

# AT THE EDGE

No.5 March 1997

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Exploring new interpretations of past and place in archaeology, folklore and mythology

The evolution of the eighteenth century Druid

A THREEFOLD COSMOS

Cosmic homes

HOLLOW HILLS

*'Far away is close at hand in images of elsewhere' -*

A peep at TAG96



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# *All things begin and end on Albion's ancient Druid rocky shore*

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY DRUID

The image of the druid, the priest of the pagan Celts, has held a grip on both the popular and scholarly imagination for over 2,000 years. However, the way in which the druid has been interpreted has varied considerably over time. Part of the reason for this enduring fascination is, ironically enough, the lack of information about what druids were up to. Reading the accounts of the earlier classical ethnographers - references to Posidonios, the works of Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, Caesar, Tacitus - provides a picture of a priesthood at the centre of Celtic society, determining the course of government and war, educating the youth, as well as constructing theology and conducting religious ritual. Later classical commentators, such as Pliny and Lucan, depict a less ubiquitous organization relegated to dark groves and grottos, practicing whatever they *did* practice in secret (see Tierney 1960; Chadwick 1966; and Kendrick 1966 for the original texts and translations). Medieval Celtic *Lives* of saints depict druids making a last-ditch effort to hold onto their status as advisors to kings and educators of the young (McCone 1991), but the Irish law tracts of the same era class druids with other undesirables such as werewolves and vagrants, and assume that what a druid would be up to was small-scale magic and witch-doctoring (Kelly 1988). Thus, writings from the period from c.135 BC to c.900 seem to show the druid on a course of

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She is the author of *Happy Is the Bride the Sun Shines On: Wedding Beliefs, Traditions, and Customs* (Chicago: Contemporary Press, 1995). This article provides a small taste of her forthcoming book, *Druids Shamans Priests: Metaphors of Celtic Paganism* (Hisarlik Press, 1997. Planned publication February, £25).

downward mobility, beginning as the companion of kings and the regulator of elite culture, and ending as a figure of folk medicine, folk religion, and folk lore.

The Renaissance, through its love of rediscovered classical texts, rediscovered the druid, but as a figure of the past, not as an experienced reality (see Owen 1962; Parry 1995; Piggott 1989). Reading the classical ethnographers, who compared the druids to the Persian *magi*, the Indian *brahmins*, and the Pythagoreans, Elizabethan scholars discovered that the British had as potentially glamorous an intellectual past as the high-status civilizations of the ancient world. The early, and apparently easy, conversion of the Celts to Christianity became co-opted in the historiography of the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism, justifying the break with Rome as a return to the primitive Christianity of the Celts before the Synod of Whitby. The druidic religion came to hold the same position vis á vis the Anglican church that Judaism was thought to hold to Christianity as a whole:

an imperfect religion awaiting a Messiah to bring it completely into God's perfection. By the 1740s, William Stukeley could confidently state that the druidic religion

'was so extremely like Christianity, that in effect, it differed from it only in this: they believed in a Messiah who was to come into the world, as we believe in him that is come . . . And though the memoirs of our Druids are extremely short, yet we can very evidently discover from them, that the Druids were of Abraham's religion entirely, at least in the earliest times, and worshipped the Supreme Being in the same manner as he did.' (Stukeley 1740: 2)

Although it is indisputable that druids were a practicing priesthood in the Celtic past, the evidence we have for them is all in the form of written accounts composed by outsiders. No druid wrote down his dogmas, his liturgy, his lore. We have no syllabi from the druidic colleges of Gaul or Ireland. We have shrines and temples and statues with god-names on them, all created under Roman influence. We

have lists of poetic repertoires, compiled centuries into the Christian era. We have no unbroken myths, only the fragments of shattered jewels reassembled by monks and lawyers.

Druids have experienced their rise and fall in the cycles of intellectual fashion. The eighteenth century was one of their high points. Yet even within this one century we can see evolution in their representation. In their different ways, Martin Martin (*Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, 1716) and John Toland (*A Critical History of the Celtic Religion* . . . , 1726) depict druids as figures of the past which must be superseded, regretfully or joyously, in order that Progress may be made. Martin's ethnography of the Western Islands is presented within the context of a plan for the economic development of the fishing industry, and his information about the beliefs and practices of the local inhabitants provided so that potential investors will be informed about the nature of the local workforce. The society he represents at the close of the seventeenth century is startlingly similar to that depicted in the Irish narratives of the medieval era: druids preside over rites of initiation for their cattle-raiding chieftains, compose and recite poems about the lineage and valor of the chieftain's family, incite war, prophesy future events, and decide all legal cases (Martin 1716: 101-5). Always, however, there is the *leitmotif* of economic exploitation. Thirty-five pages of incidences of the second sight are followed by fifteen on a plan for the fishing industry. Martin is impressed with the druids' herbal lore, because he sees financial possibilities in exporting these remedies. Druids are symptomatic of the isolated, insular lifestyle that must inevitably give way to the modern era and mainstream British civilization.

Martin's *Description* is the first modern book to pay any attention to druids as contemporary survivals of an archaic way of life. Previously, all discussions of druids and druidism had relied solely on the testimony of the classical writers. John Toland, in his *Critical History*, is the first to introduce the material of the

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The association of druids and megaliths added a new aspect to the representation of druids, the image of the druid as scientist and engineer.

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medieval Celtic literatures into the discourse. In looking at this work, it is important to understand that it is not so much a book in itself, as a series of letters from Toland to the Irish peer, Robert, Viscount Moleworth, asking for patronage (i.e. financial support) for a book that he *wants* to write. He never got the money, and the letters, written in 1718-19 and published posthumously, merely outline what Toland knows already and what areas he believes need further research.

What Toland knows is that previous writers on the subject have completely ignored the references to druids in medieval Irish literature, the sagas as well as the saints' *Lives*. What particularly annoys Toland is that this ignorance betrays a disdain for the very people whose priests they are describing: Why are the Gallic or Irish superstitions more unfit to be transmitted to posterity, than those of the Greeks and Romans he asks (Toland 1726: 93). (Toland had little respect for Greek and Roman superstitions either, but he will not grant them superior status to the Celtic.) He illustrates the necessity of understanding the Celtic languages in any discussion of druidism by showing how an ignorance of Irish has led to gross misinterpretations of Celtic god-names, such as Ognios (Toland 1726: 70-6).

While Toland demands respect for Irish culture, he has no high opinion of the druids as religious figures. To him they are Catholic priests—*manques*, political, power-hungry and unscrupulous, who imported their bag of tricks wholesale into the Catholic faith when they saw they had no option but to convert. To this radical Deist, druidic magic and Catholic miracles alike served to keep the populace in a state of gullible credulity; control over the educational system preserved power and privilege; orally-transmitted druidic doctrines (which could be changed at will without leaving a paper trail) and Latin Catholic liturgy both prevented the common man from direct communication with the Deity. For Toland, writing about the druids was a way to covertly attack Catholicism and mainstream Anglicanism and their priesthoods, while at the same time demanding respect for his native Irish culture.

## Druids and megaliths

The aspect of druidism that Toland most wanted to research further was the connection between druids and the megalithic remains of the British Isles. He most likely picked up the idea from John Aubrey, whom he met in 1694 (Toland 1726: 146; Piggott 1975: 135-6; 1989: 141). The association of druids and stone circles is the most ineradicable legacy of Enlightenment Druidomania to posterity. Where earlier writers had based their investigations of druidism solely on literary sources, in the middle of the eighteenth century, druids were increasingly sought in material remains. Toland, Henry Rowlands (*Mona Antiqua Restaurata*, 1723), William Stukeley (*Stonehenge: A Temple Restored to the Druids*, 1740; *Abury, A Temple of the British Druids*, 1743), William Borlase (*Observations on the Antiquities of Cornwall*, 1754) and numerous others combed



the countryside of Britain noting megaliths, cromlechs, dolmens, and circles and generally spotting evidence of druidism under every bush. Indeed, the wealth of megalithic remains, coupled with the assumption that each complex was the equivalent of a church or altar, led Toland to comment drily that 'it appears that the druids were planted as thick upon the ground as parish priests, nay much thicker' (Toland 1726: 130).

The association of druids and megaliths added a new aspect to the representation of druids, the image of the druid as scientist and engineer. The classical ethnographers had noted the druids' expertise in 'natural philosophy', i.e. science, as well as their medical lore. In an age obsessed with both divining nature's mysteries and implementing its 'improvement', the scientific druid was a glamorous figure. Furthermore, at a time when the discipline of archaeology was barely born, there were only two sources for information on the world's past: the classics, and the Bible. Britain does not enter into the Bible, and all classical references to the islands date from the period after the Celticization of the population. As far as anyone knew, all material remains predating the Roman occupation were Celtic, and therefore any ritual architecture must be druidic.

The task, therefore, was to correlate the local prehistory of Britain with the world history contained in the Bible. Since the Bible represents the origin of mankind amongst the people who became the Jews, the Celts and their druids must be grafted on to the genetic and linguistic stock of the Hebrew. The logical place to begin this process was the dispersal of peoples after the Flood (the genetic relationship) and the fall of the Tower of Babel (the linguistic relationship). Much energy was expended calculating how long it would take a tribe to migrate from the Near East to Britain,



The archetypal Romantic Druid.  
From F. Grose, *Antiquities of England and Wales*, 1773-87.

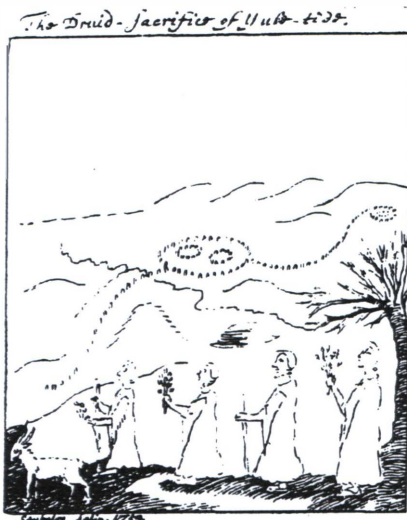
and how close the languages spoken after Babel would have been to the original Hebrew, and how long it would take Hebrew to evolve into something like Welsh. All in all, the results derived were highly flattering to the British, who were represented as being very near descendants of Noah's family, and whose cultural isolation during ancient times allowed them to preserve a nearly pure form of Jehovah's faith under the guidance of the druids. At the same time, these linguistic conjectures reveal a certain cultural chauvinism, in that they seem to be predicated on the belief that one guttural, incomprehensible language (Hebrew) is indistinguishable from another guttural, incomprehensible language (Welsh). The same chauvinism led to the constant rumors of Welsh Indians in North America around the same time.

The most difficult point for Rowlands, Stukeley, Borlase and their colleagues was how to deal with the classical evidence for savagery among the druids, particularly the accusations of human sacrifice, for unlike Toland, these writers wanted their druids to be likeable chaps. The underlying agenda of showing that druidism was actually a nascent form of

Christianity, corrupted by Catholicism and now restored to its primitive purity in the Anglican church, made the rehabilitation of the druidic reputation absolutely necessary. What eventually emerged was a cyclical vision of the religious history of Britain: a pure faith brought in ancient times by refugees from Babel, slowly falling into corruption through natural human nature and the decadence of the Roman Empire; its revitalization as a result of exposure to the truest faith, Christianity, followed by another slow decline under the baleful influence of Roman Catholicism; its recovery at the Reformation and return to those primitive roots, as though the Middle Ages were just a bad dream. The fate of druidic religion, however, was a tacit warning to Enlightenment Anglicans that, as it was demonstrable that the true religion had been lost (or temporarily misplaced) in the past, eternal vigilance must be maintained.

The amateur archaeologists and local historians who wrote these books were almost without exception men of the cloth. Their druids were men much like themselves, perhaps a little grander and more powerful, but





'The Druid Sacrifice of Yule-tide'.  
Stukeley's vision against a  
backdrop of Silbury Hill and the  
stones at Avebury.

on the whole, men who combined a religious vocation with an interest in the latest scientific and philosophical trends. Towards the end of the century, the image of the druid underwent another metamorphosis, into the figure of the Romantic poet. The huge, pan-European popularity of James Macpherson's Ossianic poetry (*Fragments of Ancient Poetry* . . . , 1760; *Fingal*, 1761; and *Temora*, 1763) made the ethnicity, rather than the learning of the Celts glamorous (see MacKillop 1986; Stafford 1988). The Celts and their druids were seen as primitive and passionate, simultaneously warring and weeping, conforming to, or indeed creating, the racial stereotype of the emotional Celt (as opposed to the rational Saxon) which was to dominate the thinking of nineteenth century ethnologists (Sims-Williams 1986).

## Iolo's druids

The man who pulled all the strands of eighteenth century druidism together was Iolo Morganwg, born Edward Williams in Glamorgan, Wales. Iolo's complex personality is surely the key to his vision of druids and their successors, the

bards, as a secret, living tradition with its roots in the most archaic past (Morgan 1975; 1981). On a most basic level, his increasing addiction to laudanum as a remedy for his asthma raises the question of how much of his own creations he believed at any given point. Certainly Iolo devised his own Glamorgan druidism and bardism as a proud banner to wave for *southern* Welsh culture, for in the late eighteenth century it was the North Welsh who dominated both back home and in the expatriate Welsh community in London. In the broader arena, Iolo's Welsh druids were a blow struck for the authenticity of Welsh culture against the dominance of English culture - Iolo reclaimed druidism from the archaeological excesses of Stukeley and his like, whose primary monuments,

Stonehenge and Avebury, were on English soil. Iolo's druids were above all verbal artists, and the language they spoke was Welsh, although Iolo did not mind conducting his ceremonies in English, if it would get him an audience. When he instituted his Gorsedd of the Bards on Primrose Hill in London in 1792, part of the ceremony was carried out in English so as to give the English reader an idea of what, though common in Wales, has never been properly known in England (Williams 1794: 200).

In part, then, Iolo was presenting an Anglophone audience with an Other Amongst Them. The rational Saesneg had no idea that such advanced knowledge and mystical poetry was being practiced right next door, as it were, in Glamorgan, which was, in the late eighteenth century, the most anglicized area of Wales. But while Iolo claimed an ancient lineage for his druidism, the system he purveyed bore an uncanny resemblance to the most radical religious and political ideas of his time. In fact, his druidic gatherings in Glamorgan were kept under observation by the

local militia in case they turned out to be up to more than versification. The Philosophical Triads bear evidence of the influence of Tom Paine (one of Iolo's heroes) and of Unitarianism (Iolo's own religion). The ideas of reincarnation and sacrifice are neatly reconciled in Iolo's claim since Man cannot possibly commit any act that is not more or less conducive to the general and ultimate good; he, through it is forbidden to him, by wantonly killing an innocent creature, removes it to a higher state of existence and consequently benefits it (Williams 1794: 200). This is because all souls are working their way up (and occasionally down) the ladder that leads from hell (*Annwfn*) through the mortal realm, to heaven. The druid *par excellence* for Iolo is, naturally, Taliesin, the poet who has been there, done that, since the dawn of time.

Iolo was a persistent and persuasive man. Even those who were dubious about the authenticity of his discoveries (how could one man keep turning up so many ancient manuscripts when no-one else did?) were hard pressed to attack him. For Iolo's main advantage was that, despite it all, he was still about the best scholar of medieval Welsh going at the time, and there were few who had the bare linguistic skills to challenge him. It took 150 years of Welsh scholarship to uncover the fact that several of the poems attributed to the fourteenth-century Welsh poet Dafydd ap Gwilym had actually been forged by Iolo.

Iolo, as well as James Macpherson, are both known today primarily as forgers. Certainly, the poems Macpherson claimed as the authentic compositions of a fourth-century Scot, and the massive quantities of verse and aphorism for which Iolo claimed medieval origin, were in fact written by themselves. However, in a strange way, it is the cultural conservatism of Scotland and Wales in relation



to England that made forging a necessity. By the eighteenth century, the present was perceived as distinctly different from the past; the sense of continuity had been broken (see Smiles 1994). Furthermore, it was now important for literary works to be ascribed to a single, identifiable author. This is the era when it became important that *Homer* composed the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and this is the era of the rise of the novel, a genre whose name reveals the expectation of uniqueness. Macpherson, gathering popular Fenian ballads, believed that the only way to present them to a sophisticated English audience was to rewrite the anonymous, popular Fenian material to conform to the popular perception of the past and expectations of single authorship. Conversely, Iolo utilized the unimpeachable pastness of druidism as a cover for his more radical political notions, and as a means of authenticating his own creative activities. Who would listen to an impoverished stonemason from Wales? But who wouldn't listen to the wisdom of the druids?

Iolo, Macpherson, and other eighteenth-century forgers were caught in the cross-fire of changing literary expectations. Their audiences did not want the real medieval world, they wanted a Never-Never Land that reflected their own sensibilities in fancy dress. The eighteenth century was an era of immense invention of tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983); Iolo and Macpherson were merely caught in the act. Yet if they had been doing the same thing a century earlier, would they perhaps have been viewed as merely a late, if idiosyncratic, representation of an authentic tradition? Why are Iolo and Macpherson forgers for incorporating mainstream, even avant garde European philosophies and literary fashions into their traditional genres, while Dafydd ap Gwilym and his fourteenth-century fellow-poets are praised for

doing the same thing? Yet how ironic that Iolo the Forger did manage to create a living tradition when he foisted his druidic ceremonies onto the infant National Eisteddfod, ensuring that to this day, respectable and honored Welshmen and women dress up as druids every summer to celebrate their culture.

It is too easy to dismiss the eighteenth century's love-affair with druidism as a sign of mental instability or chicanery. In talking about druids, eighteenth century writers managed to touch on nearly every important topic of their world: religion, politics, colonialism, ethnicity, language, engineering, philosophy, science. In defining the druids, they defined themselves. In our contemporary musings on druids and druidism, perhaps we should be aware that we are doing the same thing.

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## *An introduction to the ancient Indo-European worldview*

ALBY STONE has written extensively on Indo-European mythology. His first book-length study, *Ymir's Flesh: North European Creation Mythologies* has just been published by Heart of Albion Press.

### Georges Dumézil and Indo-European tripartition - a brief history

1930 was to prove something of a landmark year for mythologists and Indo-Europeanists. In the *Journal Asiatique* for that year, Georges Dumézil published an article on social structure in ancient Indian and Iranian cultures. He asserted that the early Indo-Iranians were formally divided into three social classes [Dumézil 1930]. To those of us raised in a notoriously class-conscious society, in which the Hindu caste system is also now a feature in some places, such a statement might seem fairly innocuous. But Dumézil's article was the beginning of a major reappraisal of Indo-European myth, legend and social tradition, and sparked a debate that continues to this day.

Dumézil examined the collection of Iranian religious texts known as the *Avesta* and found references to priests, warriors, cultivators, and artisans - the last two being divisions of a broader 'working class' - and found the same pattern<sup>1</sup> in later Iranian texts, in Scythian and Ossetic traditions, and in India from

Vedic times onward<sup>2</sup> (see below). In 1932 Emile Benveniste published a response in the same journal. Benveniste not only confirmed Dumézil's proposals but suggested that the tripartite social division was bound up with an Avestan myth of Yima, the first man, creating a subterranean kingdom - a mythical sociogony echoed in Ferdowsi's epic *Shah-nama* when Jamshid (Yima as a pseudohistorical figure) divides humanity into similar classes.

The next significant development came in 1938, when Dumézil published a study of Roman priesthood in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*. In this article, Dumézil pointed out the correspondence between the three Indian castes, Celtic social divisions, and the Roman priests associated with the Capitoline triad of Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus. He noted that there are differences between the three systems. The Indian expresses rigid social classes and a clearly defined hierarchy and ranges of influence; while the Roman one represents social functions or activities. Dumézil stressed their fundamental similarity [Dumézil 1938].

Dumézil continued to develop this theme. 1940 saw the publication of *Mitra-Varuna*, a study of dual representations of sovereignty in Indo-European (IE) tradition, in which he examined the IE concept of sovereignty, concluding that it tended to be two-fold, comprising a legal-juridical aspect and a magico-religious one [Dumézil 1940]. In *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus* (1941) Dumézil first examined Indo-Iranian tripartition and related issues, asserting that it was not just an

Indo-Iranian phenomenon - rather, it belonged to the entire ancient IE world, part of a common heritage then showed how it was deeply ingrained in Roman culture. It was in this study that the extent of IE tripartition as Dumézil saw it first became really clear: it was relevant to social structure, traditional history, myth, ritual, and magic [Dumézil 1941]. Over the next four decades, Dumézil - along with an ever-increasing number of adherents, some of whom styled themselves his 'disciples' - gradually drew out more examples of this tripartition. Dumézil's own work reached new heights with *Les dieux des Indo-Européens* and *L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens* in 1952 and 1958 respectively, in which he synthesised and consolidated his earlier work; and again with the series *Myth et épopée*, the first volume of which was published in 1968, tracing the passage of archaic myth into epic and pseudo-history.

The tripartite schema formed the core of Dumézil's work from the 1930s until his death in 1985. Elsewhere in the vast corpus of his writings, he addressed many other issues relevant to IE cultural history. However, it is the trifunctional ideology that concerns us here.

### Ideology and functions

Dumézil characterised the tripartite system as an *idéologie*. This does not quite signify an ideology as the word is generally used in modern parlance. Dumézil used the term as a catch-all embracing 'philosophy' and 'conception', as well as 'ideas'<sup>3</sup>



[Belier 1991: 29-30]. He called the three strata 'functions', another sociological term modified for his own purpose. In Dumézil's usage, a function refers to one of the three social strata, plus its divine representations and attributes, and their associated behaviours - but it has a more fundamental meaning, denoting 'the principles in terms of which these phenomena are defined' [Littleton 1982: 5]. This is stressed by his equation of 'three modes of activity' with 'three social functions' in the 1938 article cited above, and the apparent synonymy of 'activity' and 'function' elsewhere in his work [Belier 1991: 29].

For Dumézil the IE 'ideology' comprised three 'functions', which generally occurred in a hierarchical order. The first function is sovereignty, often divided into the legal-judicial or secular and the magico-religious or sacred, responsible for social and cosmic order. This function is represented by both kings and priests, though it was probably originally wholly sacerdotal. The second function is physical force, represented by warriors, involving physical strength and martial themes. The third is fertility and prosperity, represented by food-producers and cultivators, but also including artisans, and embracing beauty, sexuality, and wealth. Like the first function, the third is often represented by a duality, a pair of equestrian twins who are protectors of the common people.

Strictly speaking, kings/priest, warriors and farmers/artisans belong to or represent the three functions rather than actually being them. The same is true of their behaviours - wisdom or sanctity belong to the first function, aggression and strength belong to the second, love and fecundity belong to the third. But they are not the functions themselves. This is because the tripartite 'ideology' is a cosmological system that reaches far beyond the merely



Top: Illustration from Olaus Magnus's *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* of 1555, showing Odin, Thor and Freya. This is based on Adam of Bremen's description of the divine triad at Uppsala. Freya appears here instead of Freyr because of a misreading of the name Fricco as Frigga, via an earlier Swedish rendering Frighe.

social or behavioural, encompassing the whole perceived cosmos and linking it to the human individual and social bodies by means of an array of correspondences and metaphors. The word 'function' may be inadequate, perhaps even confusing, but in context it is probably as good as any.

## Origins of the trifunctional system

The trifunctional system is based on the image most familiar to everyone, the human body. This is hinted at in the medieval Irish story of Lugalaid Riab nDerg ('of the red stripes') who was conceived when his mother slept with her three brothers on the same night, so that he had three fathers. He was born with red stripes around his neck and waist: his head resembled that of his father Nár ('noble'); his arms and chest resembled Bres ('combat'); and from the waist down he resembled Lóthar ('washtub' or 'trough'). Lugalaid's fathers clearly belong to the three functions, and it is no surprise that he went on to become a king [Lincoln 1986: 158-62].

The basic IE social tripartition arises from an identification of the cosmos with the human body. Each

function refers to the three main sections of the body, just as it is divided in the story of Lugalaid. The most prominent feature of IE creation mythology is the dismemberment of one primordial twin by his brother, following which the cosmos is made from the divided parts, which are transformed into their homologues: bone to stone, blood to water, flesh to earth, skull to sky, and so on. Versions of this myth were known in India and Iran, and among the Germans. Its echoes can be seen in Irish and Roman tradition. While the transmutation of human tissue into cosmic matter is not in itself confined to the tripartite pattern, the essential unity of humanity and cosmos is perfectly drawn [Lincoln 1986].

But IE cosmogony is directly relevant to the three functions. The *Purusasukta* - a creation hymn from the *Rig Veda* - tells how the cosmos was made from the division of Purusha the primal man. This also gives rise to the social classes: priests from his mouth, warriors from his arms, commoners from his thighs, and servants from his feet. In the same hymn the division of Purusha gives rise to the four directions, and to three cosmic layers - the heavens, the atmosphere, and the earth. The three-layer cosmos is also found in Rome, where the *Ius Fetiales*, a type of priesthood whose rôle





The Holy Oak at Prussian Romové, as depicted in 1864.

was the ritual claiming of foreign territory for the Roman state, invoked the triad Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus as well as three groups of gods known as the *caelestes*, *terrestres* and *inferni*. Cosmic tripartition also occurs in Norse myth, with the three roots of the tree Yggdrasil that reach to the heavens, the earth and the underworld.

The cosmos/body homology is reiterated time and again in IE tradition, as is the tripartite structure of the cosmos. The mythical creation is also relevant to the tripartition of society, though it is not the only sociogenic tradition.

## Social tripartition

We have seen that Iranian society in the Avestan period was divided into three classes (*athravan* - 'priests'; *rathaelstar* - 'warriors'; *vastriyofsyant* - 'farmers' and *huitis* - 'artisans'), which resembled the Indian division of society into *Brahmanas*, *Ksatriyas* and *Vaiśyas* - priests, warriors, farmers. There is a fourth group, the *Sudras*, the servants

mentioned in the *Purushasukta*. The first three only are known as *Arya*: in other words, the *Sudras* were not originally part of the early Indic ethnic group. The original Indo-Iranian tripartition is demonstrated by the tradition of Scythian origins recorded by Herodotus in his *Histories*. Four golden objects - a yoke and plough, a sword, and a libation cup - fell from the sky and were claimed by Kolaxais, the youngest of three brothers, who became king by virtue of possession. These objects represent the three functions, the yoke and plough together representing the third. Kolaxais was the ancestor of the Paralatai, the 'Royal Scythians'; from his brother Lipoxais the Aukhatai 'Warrior Scythians' were descended; while from the third, Arpoxais, came the Katiaroi and Traspies, the 'Agricultural Scythians' (i.e. herders and farmers) <sup>4</sup>.

Similar tripartitions can be seen in other early historical IE groups. Although their mythical origins are not preserved, in *De Bello Gallico* Julius Caesar tells us that the Gauls were divided

into *druides*, *equites* and *plebes*. Tacitus records a Germanic tradition of a primordial being called Tuisto, whose son Mannus begot three sons, whose offspring were known as Herminiones, Istvaeones and Ingvaeones. These are problematic names, but they do seem to refer to the three functions [Puhvel 1987: 285-6; Lincoln 1986: 47].

The Old Icelandic poem *Rígsdula* tells how the god Heimdallr, using the name Rígr, goes out into the world and fathers four children: Dræll, Karl, Jarl and Konrungr. These are a serf, farm-worker, nobleman and sorcerer (the last is also a pun on *konungr* 'king') - a situation that may not be typical of early Germanic society, but which is relevant to medieval Scandinavia and is not far removed from ancient India and Iran. The name *Rígr* 'king' again points to the embodiment of all three functions in the royal person [Dunénil 1973: ch. 6; Puhvel 1987: 191-2].

## Divine triads

The Capitoline triad of Jupiter, Mars and Quirinus has already been mentioned. Other equivalent trifunctional sets - where a clearly-defined group of three gods, or three main gods plus subsidiary divinities, are venerated or represented together as a formal triad - include Odin, Thor and Freyr depicted together in the pagan temple at Uppsala in Sweden, according to an account given by Adam of Bremen - though a later depiction by Olaus Magnus substitutes the goddess Frigg for Freyr (see page 7). Odin's position as leader of the Æsir and his magical abilities mark him out as a clear first function figure. Thor was the defender of the gods, the most bellicose of their number. The image of Freyr at Uppsala was ithyphallic.

In Baltic pagan religion, the trio Patulas, Perkunas and Patrimpas - venerated together at the sacred oak of Romové in pagan Prussia up to the



sixteenth century - are evidently in the same mould. Patulas was, like Odin, a god of the dead. Sacrifices to him consisted of the heads of an ox, a horse, and a man: the head is the part of the body belonging to the first function. If Patulas was dissatisfied and needed to be appeased, the only satisfactory offering was the blood of a priest. Perkunas was depicted as a red-faced, angry man. The noblest prisoners of war were sacrificed to him. Patrimpas, portrayed as a smiling young man wearing a wreath made of ears of grain, was honoured with child sacrifice. He was associated with fertility, growth and renewal [Usaciovaite 1996].

The earliest possible textual reference to a set of trifunctional divinities occurs in a treaty between the Hittites and Mitanni, preserved on a clay tablet of about the fourteenth century BCE. The treaty invokes thirty deities, among whom are the following: *ilani Mi-it-ra-ash-shi-il ilani U-ru-w-na-sh-shi-el ilu In-da-ra ilani Na-sha-at-ti-an-na*. These are the thirteenth to sixteenth deities named in the text [Belier 1991: 60]. These are recognisably the same as Indian Mitra, Varuna, Indra and the Nasatyas - a sequence invoked in two important rituals, the building of the *ahavaniya* altar and the pressing of soma. Mitra and Varuna, invoked as a pair, are a joint representation of sovereignty, the legal-juridical and magico-religious duality that make up the first function. Indra is the belligerent thunder-god, equivalent to Thor and Perkunas, while the Nasatyas are the same as the Asvins, the horse-twins who protect the social groups associated with the third function; they are equivalent to the Dioskuroi of Greek myth.

A divine triad seems also to have existed among the Gauls. The Roman poet Lucan in his *Pharsalia* describes human sacrifices made to three gods, Teutates, Esus and Taranis. Their names indicate a functional tripartition: Teutates

is from the same root as Irish *tuath* 'people', and so is equivalent to Quirinus. Esus (also occurring as Aesus) seems to mean 'lord'. Taranis means simply 'thunder'. Esus is depicted on the Gallo-Roman altar found in 1711 at the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, along with two other gods, named as Jovis and Volcanus. Unfortunately the vagaries of the *interpretatio Romana* have obscured this particular triad.

## The three sins of the warrior

Just as a king embodied the three functions as a prerequisite for authority and obligation, so the warrior was bound by his position to uphold the integrity of the tripartite system. Dumézil identified a strand of IE tradition in which the warrior commits crimes against each of the functions and is punished accordingly. The two best examples are Indra and the flawed Norse hero Starkaðr [Littleton 1982: 123-7].

Indra's crimes are his involvement in the murder of a Brahman; cowardly use of his strength; and rape. He loses first his *tejah* or spirituality, then his physical strength and virility; and finally his beauty. His *tejah* is reborn as Yudhishtira, an embodiment of *dharma*; his virility is incarnated as the warrior Arjuna, and his physical strength as the primitive Bhima; and his beauty is born again in the twins Nakula and Sahadeva.

Starkaðr - as Starcatherus in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus, first commits regicide, throttling Wicarus king of Norway; then causes Sweden to lose a war through his cowardice in battle; then accepts money to kill Olo, king of Denmark, as the unfortunate monarch is taking a bath. The first two sins are clearly related to the first and second functions. The third crime involves money and water (an element often found in third function contexts), and the slaughter of an 'off-duty' king who may be considered a

temporary commoner.

Dumézil also discerned this motif in the career of Herakles, though his analysis is not all that convincing. Another example is Gronwy Pebyr, villain of the *Mabinogion* story of Math son of Mathonwy, in the section dealing with the trifunctional figure Lleu Llaw Gyffes. Gronwy's sins are adultery with Lleu's wife, cowardly murder (as Lleu is about to enter a bath) and usurpation of Lleu's domain [Stone 1996].

## The critics

The significance of the *idéologie tripartite* is that it is unique to the IE-speaking world. So claimed Dumézil, and so believe many subsequent explorers of IE culture and tradition. In theory, it was present in the earliest IE culture, the putative Proto-Indo-Europeans, from whom it was inherited by descendant peoples. While we still do not know for certain who these Proto-Indo-Europeans were, or where they came from - or even if they really existed at all as a single ethnic unit - the distribution of formal tripartition and allied trifunctional themes and representations throughout the various branches of IE does imply something of the sort.

It is very difficult to separate Dumézil's name from the trifunctional system, so much so that one could easily believe that Dumézil invented it rather than rediscovered it. While Dumézil must be lauded for recognising and reconstructing it from a wide range of evidence, it is no more his invention than the Americas were the invention of Columbus, or Uranus of Herschell. The constant association of Dumézil with the IE trifunctional system has led to a rather strange situation which allows it to be criticised on two grounds: its own integrity, and the integrity of its discoverer.

The *idéologie tripartite* received a mixed reception. Some scholars railed against the tripartite ideology in its entirety, while others attempted to

undermine the edifice by concentrating their attacks on other aspects of Dumézil's work - his translations of primary texts, and his interpretation of various figures in the traditions he examined. Dumézil became embroiled in a number of acrimonious and increasingly personalised disputes, something that would plague him all his life. One one hand, there were attacks from adherents of earlier paradigms - Frazerians and primitivists - while on the other were those, mainly specialists such as Classicists and Indologists, who for one reason or another were intent on disavowing the existence of trifunctionalism in their chosen field. Debates grew hot, and became bitterly prolonged.

Even so, the first significant attack on trifunctionalism did not come until 1959. In that year the Indologist John Brough - who had begun his assault on Dumézil's theory on a BBC radio programme in 1956 - offered an interesting experiment. His article 'The tripartite ideology of the Indo-Europeans: an experiment in method' in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* included an analysis of Old Testament material along supposedly Dumézilian lines. Brough claimed to be able to find a trifunctional pattern in the Books of Judges, Samuel and Kings. Brough rounded off this supposed control experiment by challenging critics to fault his methodology and analysis; and asserting that the appearance of tripartition is actually due to the fact that the tripartite structure encompasses all areas of human activity.

Brough's argument is specious. Dumézil's inevitable response was typically lengthy and characteristically thorough. He pointed out that Brough had really just plucked out certain figures who could be juggled to make an appearance of functional tripartition, but that there was no reference to a trifunctional representation in Brough's chosen texts.

Intriguingly, Dumézil also pointed out that there might be one in Jeremiah 9:23: 'let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches' - which he suggests might be a warning against adopting the ways of IE foreigners.

As for the trifunctional ideology covering the entire gamut of human activity and endeavour: of course it does. It encompasses human rank, occupation and preoccupation in the same way that it does the body and the cosmos. It would be a poor cosmological system if it did not.

The point is that the tripartition is not purely social; nor is it wholly physical, or solely cosmic. The shape and structure of society both represents and is represented by the body. Both represent and are represented by the cosmos. Each one is a metaphor, a homologue of the others. In IE traditions the essence of each function is simultaneously social, bodily, and cosmic. It is fundamentally a holistic philosophy, a set of cosmological rules governing classification, relationships between things, and the way things work.

The examples cited here - a mere fraction of the available evidence - show just how the ancient Indo-Europeans formalised the trifunctional structure. It is explicitly stated in invocations and ritual formulae. It is given a historical legitimacy in creation mythology, epic and traditional history. It is publicly displayed in the form of triadic divinities, and reiterated by the kinds of ritual and sacrifices made to them. The deeds of heroes - and villains - are constructed in accordance with it. Kings and national goddesses embody it. Social classes are born from it.

The body of evidence for a pan-IE trifunctionalism is, in the eyes of its adherents, overwhelming. Yet assaults on its veracity continue. One recent critique, a lengthy and detailed dissection of Dumézil's *oeuvre*

[Belier 1991], has a strangely paradoxical effect on the reader. Belier minutely criticises Dumézil's methodology, interpretation and the progress of the theory's development - yet in so doing he parades such a wealth of examples of social tripartition, divine functional triads and so on, that one reaches the final page wondering whether he is condemning Dumézil or circuitously supporting the trifunctional structure. He concludes by stressing the difference between the empirical study of religions with the 'unlimited comparative study of religions', quoting J.G. Platvoet for whom comparative methodology is 'loose . . . subjectivistic' and involves 'selective perception . . . ordering data according to a preconceived interpretative framework' which leads to a confirmation of expectations. Belier, relating this contrast to Dumézil's work, states that the 'high level of applicability of the theory was due to its highly flexible character and not to its high scientific content' [Belier 1991: 239]. In a later essay, Belier examines Dumézil's bipartition of the first function and finds it wanting, just as he had done in his 1991 critique. Dumézil's theory is again criticised for its elasticity, and its lack of empiricism [Belier 1996]. In both studies Belier raises the spectre of Brough, and implicitly disparages Dumézil's regular changes of mind and continual reassessment of his own ideas.

If anything, Dumézil's habit of self-assessment should be highlighted as a positive characteristic, especially in the context of a theoretical framework developed over half a century and encompassing such a vast amount of material. Similarly, a theory which is simultaneously flexible and precise in its essentials - ritual tripartition unique to a particular linguistic-cultural continuum, the Indo-European-speakers - is surely worthy of respect. Platvoet's opinion, as



quoted by Belier, is neither true nor relevant: as we have seen, Dumézil originally suggested *quadripartition* for the *Indo-Iranians*, and IE tripartition developed from that initial scenario. Hardly the fitting of data into a preconceived framework. Furthermore, in quoting Platvoet, Belier seems to have ignored the peculiar meaning the word 'comparative' has for Indo-Europeanists: comparative mythology is the study of relationships that exist between IE myths (and related IE religious beliefs and practices). Comparative religion, on the other hand, is the study of different religious traditions - a search for points of difference, as well as common ground, among belief-systems with differing theologies and diverse origins. For Dumézil, as for many other Indo-Europeanists, the whole point is that this process involves *one* basic system that has become diversified over several millennia.

From Brough to Belier - though many others could be mentioned - critics have found fault with the minutiae of Dumézil's work, parodied his methods, or, like Carlo Ginzburg and Bruce Lincoln (a former believer), have come to reject trifunctionalism because of Dumézil's alleged links with fascism, a charge forcefully rejected in a recent article by Jaan Puhvel [Ginzburg 1990: 126-145; Lincoln 1991: 231-8; Puhvel 1996]. Yet the criticism and rebuttals are unable to dispel the reality of so many instances of divine, ritual, cosmic and social tripartition that can only be adequately explained by assuming a common way of thought.

## Notes

[1] Dumézil found that the priest and warrior classes were consistent throughout the Indo-Iranian continuum, while the cultivators/artisans were less well-defined. He came to regard artisans and cultivators as subdivisions of one class [Littleton 1982: 50].

[2] The oldest parts of the *Avesta* represent a textual redaction (of before c. 500 CE) of oral compositions that may date from the middle of the second millennium BCE, making them roughly contemporary with the Indian *Rig Veda*. The Scythians, a group mainly nomadic tribes of the Eurasian steppes, spoke an Iranian language; their traditions were reported by Herodotus in the fifth century BCE. The Ossetes of Caucasian Russia, who are probably descended from the Alans, a Scythian people, preserved a large body of oral epic and legend that was recorded in the nineteenth century.

[3] Belier is mildly scathing on the interchangeability of these words in Dumézil's work. Yet it is quite clear that Dumézil was using *idéologie* to denote all these things, and more, by a single word. As Dumézil himself explains: 'the structure of a system of thought, an explanation of the world - in brief, a theology and a philosophy or, if one prefers, simply an ideology' [Littleton 1982: 266].

[4] This interpretation was rejected by Benveniste, who preferred to see these names as tribal designations. Dumézil later accepted this, but continued to toy with variations on his original analysis [Littleton 1982: 138]. Littleton, like Dumézil, remains ambivalent [Littleton and Malcor 1994: 11]; but Jaan Puhvel accepts the Scythian myth as a trifunctional expression [Puhvel 1987: 113-4].

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# cosmic HOMES

*In this 'around the world in eighty paragraphs' tour your editor continues his long-running quest for sacred centres, and enters a variety of houses hoping for a glimpse of the cosmos.*

'Every dwelling, by paradox of consecration of space and by the rite of its construction, is transformed into a "centre". Thus, all houses - like all temples, palaces and cities - stand in the self-same place, the centre of the universe' (Eliade 1958: 379)

Every house is built on the earth. Each house is under the sky. The traditional materials of construction are taken either from the earth or the plants growing on it. Further, in many traditional belief systems, the creation of the earth and the plants is closely linked to the ritual dismemberment of a primeval human or giant.

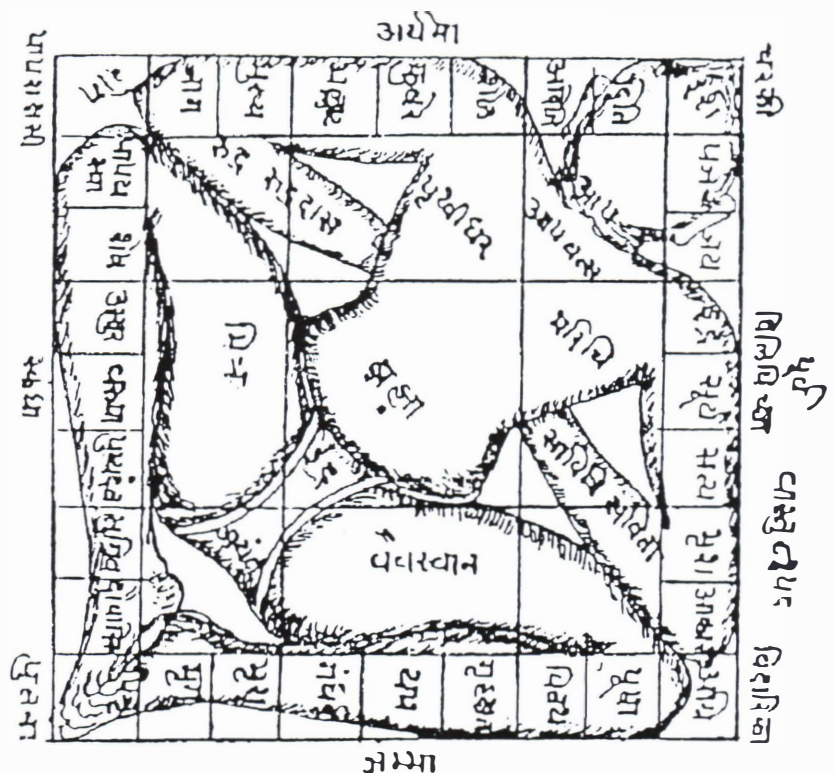
An Indian story relates how the gods created the world by performing a sacrifice with the body of Purusha, the first person. The sky rose from his head, the air from his navel, the earth from his feet, the moon from his mind, the sun from his eye, and the four quarters of space from his ear.

On the other side of the globe, an Aztec legend likewise puts the connections between body and environment in mythic terms. The gods Quetzacoatl, the Plumed Serpent, and Tezcatlipoca, the Smoking Mirror, fashioned the world from the body of the goddess Tlalteuti. From her hair they made trees, flowers, and

grasses; from her eyes, springs, fountains, and little caves; from her nose, valleys; and from her shoulders, mountains.

We know that early Greek societies settled their landscape in a manner which made careful use of the space. Each focal point, 'whether that of each house or that of the *polis* as a whole, was ideally placed upon a well-chosen, well-situated eminence, sunlit and close to an abundant source of water.' (Lefebvre 1991: 249) The earliest Greek societies were communal, although discrete-

household societies such as Troy, Ithaca and Phaeacia are clearly depicted in the *Iliad* (ninth century BC) and Homer's *Odyssey* (eighth century BC). 'The Homeric household is a symbolic object. It is first of all something extraordinarily concrete: a dwelling. . . . It can be recognised by its raised roof, supported by a central beam. . . . The roof covers the *eschara*, central hearth, which was not only circular but also womblike (the word *eschara* was used in fact for the female



The Vastu Purusha mandala which originates in an ancient Indian manual on architecture. It was used as the fundamental pattern for almost every type of building in India - from simple huts to entire cities.



genitals). . . . The house envelops, the hearth gives birth, the fire is born each day . . . (Leduc 1992: 239-240)

## Houses are in us

Environments are thought before they are built. However, Winston Churchill is reported to have recognised that the event is neither static nor one-way, 'First we shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us.'

In traditional beliefs cosmos, temple, house and human body all interweave intricately. This raises a number of fundamental questions, such as 'Do the design of traditional houses derive from the symbolism of the sanctuary or *vice versa*?' The answers to such 'chicken and egg' questions are not mutually exclusive. Rather, we should consider that house images move in two directions: they are in us as much as we are in them. Consider Western children's drawings of houses with two windows and a door - two eyes and a mouth - an apparently intuitive projection of the self in the house. To cite but one other example of this universal union, a Vedic text refers to the body as 'a house with a pillar and nine doors'.

Other dimensions of thinking also knit into this fabric of symbolism. A house is a home for a group of people - in many cultures, this is an extended family. The land on which the house stands is often part of an inherited property which gives the lineage a sense of identity with the land. In many societies, not least our own, houses are images of power.

If this suggests that houses are essentially secular, think again. Domestic activities include both ritual and secular actions. Not necessarily anything so overt as household shrines or memento-laden mantelpieces; nevertheless, even in one of the most secular societies - our own, we imbue the house with ritual. Think of

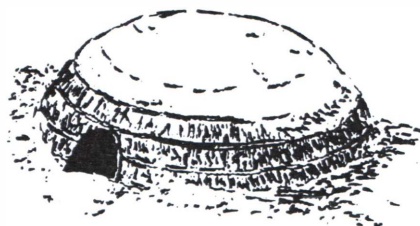
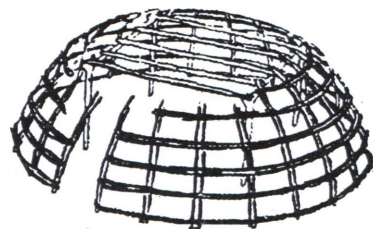
the difference between opening the door to a neighbour who you see nearly every day and, say, greeting the arrival of friends not seen for some time, or an insurance broker who has arranged a meeting. It is only a few decades since, even in modest-sized houses, the 'front room' or 'parlour' with its ancestral furnishings was reserved for rites of passage and formal visitors such as the vicar. The British 'tea ceremony' welcome is as rich with ritual, if without as much elegance, as the Japanese counterpart.

Taoist texts repeatedly show that the construction of a house - especially the installation of the all-important ridgepole - was regarded cosmologically. Indeed, such beliefs are held by traditional builders in Taiwan to this day. And who are we to smile and consider this as kinda quaint when construction of our major buildings are marked with ceremonies for breaking the ground or laying foundation stones and, consistently, for 'topping out'?

[The ideas of several authors have been incorporated in these opening paragraphs, principally Bachelard (1964: xxxiii); Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995: 3); Eliade (1986); Lawlor (1994: 99-100); Rapoport (1969); Stone (1997); Waterson (1995: 60); Wilson (1992).]

## Cosmic houses in the Americas

Sacred architecture in every part of the world creates a microcosm of time and space - an *imago mundi* or 'omphalos'. Temples are orientated to the cardinal directions and their construction reflects symmetry and balance by incorporating nested forms of equilibrium such as squares, circles or octagons. Buddhist *stupas* are based on mandala-like 'nests'



The winter shelters, or *ki*, constructed by the Pima of south-west America embody a microcosm. The circle of holes denote the horizon; the four posts supporting the crossbeams define the primal architectural form; and the dome of willow poles signifies the vault of the heavens. After Lawlor (1994).

of concentric squares and circles culminating in a bell-shaped structure which contains a relic or statue of Buddha. The same architectural principles can be found in the ancient cultures of Egypt, Greece, China, Japan, Mexico and still persist in Western churches, Islamic mosques, and among native American peoples. (Lawlor 1994: 45)

Among the Haida, a sedentary hunting and fishing society on the north-west coast of North America, 'each house was the centre of the universe for its inhabitants.' Houses faced the beach which was both the

source of socially prestigious foods and regarded as the route to the underworld. Behind the houses, toward the inland mountains, was the overworld and the domains where mortuary houses were located. Furthermore, the central hearth of each house 'defined the pivot of the world' and, by burning offerings, the inhabitants could communicate with ancestors and the spirits of the underworld. (Whitelaw 1994: 234)

'The Kwakiutl of British Columbia say that a copper pole, manifesting itself as the Milky Way, connects the underworld, earth and sky. The massive trunk of a cedar tree, more than thirty feet tall, evokes this mythic image in the Kwakiutl ceremonial house. During the initiation ceremonies that take place there, the participants declare, "I am the Centre of the World. . . . I am at the Post of the World."' (Lawlor 1994: 54)

The Oglala Sioux have a ritual to establish an altar at 'the centre of the world'. According to Black Elk (in Brown 1972: 108) the officiant points his axe at the four cardinal directions, then at the heavens and finally the earth. This is repeated with a stick purified by smoke. At 'this centre, which in reality is everywhere, is the home, is the dwelling place of *Waken-Tanka* [the Great Spirit].

'The Pima of the American Southwest employed the archetypal elements of the cosmic house in their winter shelters, or *ki*, creating microcosms of universal design. A circle of holes dug into the earth imitated the horizon that rims human perception. Four posts connected by crossbeams defined the primal architectural form. A dome of willow poles echoed the endless canopy of the sky.' (Lawlor 1994: 46)

The *kivas* of the Pueblo Indians of the south-western United States have fascinated anthropologists and architects

for more than a century. The dramatic canyon, *mesa* and mountain landscape is the setting for a complex ceremonial and symbol-rich lifestyle. The house: world relationships of the Pueblo appear as a process which helps to define a person's position in the community and the broader world. (Saile 1985: 159)

Navajo dwellings are equally rich in implicit symbolism. Buildings of all types customarily face east. Some old-style *hogans* are cone-shaped earth-covered log structures based on frames of forked poles, one in each of the four cardinal directions. The frame orients the dwelling to the four sacred mountains in the four corners of the Navajo homeland. *Hogans* are among the main customary places for story telling during both ceremonies and in the family's daily life. There is a customary open fire in the middle of the floor below the smoke hole (even though stoves are used for 'everyday' heating and cooking). Sand paintings are made on the floor at the back (west side) of the *hogan*. (Kelley and Francis 1994: 117)

Keeping this fast-paced tour of the American traditional cultures moving further south, let us 'do' Guiana. This is not a country as such but a region in the north-east corner of South America, politically divided between five countries. For the Ye'cuanna of Guiana 'The house [*annaka*] is an exact replica of the universe. At ground level the *annaka* is equated with the "sea" (*dama*) at the centre of the world while the *asa* [domestic space within] is the inhabited earth (*nono*). The conical roof is the sky, also divided into an upper and lower part, physically represented by two different types of thatch . . . . The main traverse roof beam runs north/south and represents the Milky Way, and the other main roof beams are referred to as "sky trees". All these beams are fixed at their lower ends to a ring of twelve outer posts called "star supports". The central housepost connects earth to sky

and the visible to the invisible world.' (Rivière 1995: 195) The roofs of the *annaka* have an unusual skylight. While it has practical functions for letting light in to the interior and for letting out smoke, it seems to have been a means of providing an astronomical calendar.

The Kogi of Columbia, the subjects of Alan Ereira's remarkable film, *From the Heart of the World*, have a coherent system of cosmology which relates to the design of their ceremonial houses. The foundation of a Kogi ceremonial house is accomplished by a 'shaman', known as a *mama*, driving a peg into the ground at the place destined to be its centre. The Kogi ceremonial house has four hearths and is designed to be a microcosmic image of the universe. As with the Ye'cuanna, there are holes in the roof which enable astronomical measurements. (Ereira 1990)

For the Tukanoa in north-west Amazonia the *maloca* or longhouse 'replicates and models the structure of the cosmos: its floor is the earth and its posts are mountains which support the roof or sky above. Down the centre of the *maloca*, from rear to front, west to east, runs an invisible river on whose banks and tributaries the people live. At rituals, human time merges with timeless myth and the *maloca* assumes the proportions and significance of the cosmos.' (Hugh-Jones 1995: 233-4)

If this is not pregnant enough with symbolism, Hugh-Jones (1995: 231) also reports that the communal hearth, situated at the rear of the house, 'is a womb which cooks the bread as a womb "cooks" a child, the starch and fibre of manioc bread being compared to flesh and bones.'

## Prehistoric cosmologies

These 'snapshots' of traditional American cultures reveal that the associations between houses and cosmological models can be



intentional and profound. An equivalent exercise in other continents would be equally productive.

There are more possibilities than looking at ethnological evidence of recent or still-thriving cultures. Archaeologists, too, are beginning to recognise that the cosmologies of prehistoric societies can be tentatively recognised in the excavated record.

An article of mine in the second issue of *At the Edge*, 'The fifth direction', attempted to portray the rich cosmological symbolism in early medieval Ireland and, in passing, described how Bricriu's Hall at Tara was constructed as a microcosm. That this was part of a deeply-rooted tradition is emerging from recent archaeological interpretation. Parker Pearson and Richards have investigated both neolithic and bronze age settlements in the British Isles and discerned a complex cosmological symbolism (1994: 38-67). They have kindly given permission to reprint the section of their book relating to neolithic houses in Orkney in *At the Edge*; see following article.

The work of Parker Pearson and Richards also provides a thorough-going overview of ethnological examples. In addition, other archaeologists have been exploring different aspects of the way prehistoric dwellings embody complex symbolism. Hodder (1990; 1994) has proposed that neolithic chamber tombs were created as 'models' of houses, for habitation by ancestors. More recently Bradley (1996) has shown that the chamber tombs at Clava Cairns had a deliberate architectural conception and he concludes that 'every structural device at Clava had a symbolic role'. While we do not know what cosmological symbolism was prevalent in the British neolithic, detailed studies of the archaeological record of house and tomb construction should enable some more predictions to be attempted.

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# LATE NEOLITHIC ORCADIAN HOUSES

*Reprinted from Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space (Routledge 1994)*

The Orkney Isles lie off the most northern tip of the British mainland. The archaeological evidence which characterizes the Neolithic period of Orkney is the presence of a number of well-constructed stone buildings and monuments. These include houses often clustered in 'villages', passage graves, and henge monuments enclosing large stone circles. Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of these constructions is the use of the local, easily laminated, sandstone slabs both to create extremely sophisticated masonry and as furniture and partitioning within the structures: hence the almost perfect survival of the most famous Neolithic settlement in Britain, Skara Brae.

The dwellings constitute the most remarkable architectural evidence as late Neolithic houses are virtually unknown in other areas of Britain. The Orcadian examples display a consistency of design which is maintained over several hundred years. The internal organization of stone furniture is a central square stone-built hearth, a rear shelving arrangement, known as a dresser, and two rectangular stone boxes, interpreted as box-beds, situated on either side of the hearth. The single entrance is positioned opposite the dresser thereby forming a cruciform pattern with the spatial organization of the house interior. These structural elements are present within all houses. In each case the internal organization of space defined by the cruciform arrangement of dresser/doorway: right-box/

MIKE PARKER PEARSON and COLIN RICHARDS are lecturers in archaeology at the Universities of Sheffield and Glasgow. Colin became interested in house cosmology during his excavations of the Neolithic village at Barnhouse on Orkney, to be published next year, and as a result of his ethnographic studies of social space on the Indonesian island of Bali. During his own ethnographic research on burial practices in Madagascar, Mike also encountered complex house cosmologies and realized that the roundhouses of the British Iron Age were organized on symbolic principles, though very different from Madagascar. His report on the excavation of an Iron Age broch at Dun Vulan in the Western Isles of Scotland, written with Niall Sharples, will also be published in 1997.

left-box is referenced to and around the central hearth. There is a striking homogeneity in the architecture of the late Neolithic house.

## The focal fire

The central positioning of the hearth establishes a commanding focal point which, in the Northern Isles, appears to have been maintained over several millennia. In the inhospitable northern climate the fire, and by extension the fireplace, is central to the maintenance of life itself. Indeed, until recently in the Northern Isles one of the gravest acts of neglect within the home was to allow the fire to go out; many fires had reputedly been kept alight for over forty years. Such attitudes would probably have been as pervasive in the Neolithic period as they are today.

Fire, as a medium of transformation, is not restricted to producing heat and light; it also facilitates the change in food from raw to cooked and hardens clay into pottery. From this point of view it is easy to

understand the consistent association of fire with supernatural and mythological qualities (e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1986). In many societies there is always an element of danger attached to fire and numerous sanctions surround its use. This extends both to ignition (e.g. Ingold 1986: 268-71) and the collection and disposal of ash (e.g. Moore 1986: 102-6). In attempting to assess the significance of the hearth in the Neolithic dwelling it may be suggested that its centrality transcended functional necessity, and that the fireplace embodied many disparate meanings as may be expected in such a dominant symbol.

The importance of the fireplace in the late Neolithic is reinforced by the evidence from the houses excavated at Barnhouse, Stenness, Orkney Mainland, where the careful laying out and assembly of the square stone hearth clearly constituted the primary act of house construction. Under these circumstances the construction rituals are likely to have been centred on the hearth and the lighting of the first fire heavily



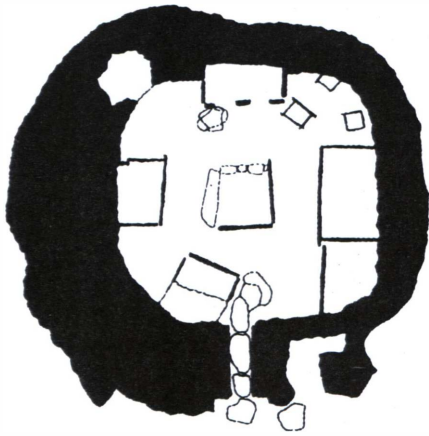


Figure 1. House 7 at Skara Brae showing the direction of access as shown by the entrance paving

sanctioned. Its alignment dictated the internal organization of the stone furniture and the orientation of the dwelling. Moreover, when houses were abandoned or demolished the hearth stones were frequently left in place.

## Dexterous asymmetry

Despite an apparent symmetry in the house interior, the entrance is frequently offset to the right. A closer examination of the stone furniture within the houses reveals that the right 'box-bed' is consistently larger than the left. This distinction is mirrored in the size of the ambry or keeping place positioned above each bed. How are these differences best understood?

The position of the doorway would appear to facilitate entry into the right side of the house. This interpretation is supported by the presence of a line of entrance slabs leading into the right side of House 7 (see fig. 1) at the settlement of Skara Brae (Childe 1931), and by the entrance leading into the right side of House 2 at Barnhouse (Richards 1990). Indeed, in both the above examples, strong architectural measures are introduced to ensure that on admittance the subject does not enter the left side of the house interior.

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the internal organization of House 2 at Barnhouse which is effectively a conjunction of two cruciform houses. This dual spatial arrangement is not restricted to buildings for the living but is also apparent within the 'houses for the dead' as at the passage grave at Quanterness. A clearer understanding of the spatial structure of House 2 at Barnhouse is provided by reconstructing the path of movement, which is strictly controlled by a combination of walling and partitioning (Fig. 2). Here, access to the left area is denied until the subject has been directed to the far side of the house and there forced to turn left. This passage has entailed walking between two posts flanking a large slab, covering a pit containing a burial, which must be stepped over. On turning left the interior organization of House 2 becomes comprehensible since the view now presented is one of re-entry, from right of centre, into an inner area displaying the familiar cruciform architectural representation.

The consistent reproduction of right-hand entry may be related to wider social categories. For instance, on crossing the threshold into the Neolithic house, it would be the right-hand side of the internal spatial arrangement which would become visible, illuminated by light coming through the doorway. The left side would remain in semi-darkness. Thus, by design, the varying quality of light available to the interior highlights the path of movement of people entering the house. As will be shown later, these differences are part of a much broader symbolic system of classifications which includes light and darkness.

How may we relate the nuances of entry to the difference in size of the stone furniture within the house? It will be noticed that the spatial balance of the house interior alters when someone enters into the right-hand area. Access

therefore produces a spatial shift whereby the 'back' area of the house occupied by the dresser no longer constitutes the

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The spatial organization may be an ideal structure of order based on cosmological themes

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deepest space. By virtue of the appropriate path of movement inside the house, leading into the right-hand area, the deepest space is now situated in the left area of the house. The architectural elements of the Neolithic house may be essentially static but they are also the framework for a symbolic organization which reveals itself through human agency, in this example through the movement of the subject within the house interior.

The spatial organization may be an ideal structure of order based on cosmological themes; human activity within the domestic space is directed by the architectural arrangements, but the architecture is itself a product of cosmology. Human action and environment form parts of a symbolic structure in which each affects and reflects the other. In certain social circumstances different aspects of this symbolic structure will be drawn on, thereby providing ontological status to everyday actions. The discrepancy in bed sizes may relate to distinctions of function, age, or gender within a left/right division of space which is realized only in specific social situations.

## Engendered interiors

Analysis of the late Neolithic settlement of Barnhouse (Richards, in prep.) reveals that different practices occurred in different houses. The hearth, however, appears frequently to have been tended and cleaned out from the left, as revealed by spreads of charcoal and burnt material trodden into the floor. High levels of phosphate in close proximity to the hearth on the left-hand side are recognizable in some houses, suggesting

areas of food preparation. Traditionally, in Orkney, it has been the woman's duty to tend the fire and prepare food on a daily basis, and whether or not we accept Childe's view that the disparity in box-bed size is attributable to gender, it seems likely that the left-hand area represented an inner domain associated with both domestic reproduction and women. This area would have been concealed in semi-darkness to anyone entering the house; their view of the interior would have been confined to the right side and rear dresser.

For certain family members, particularly women, everyday life in the house would have been constituted through a sequence of activities occurring either within the house or in the outside world. A series of tasks undertaken within spheres of temporality situated people at specific places. Each of these tasks was undertaken in the 'correct' place and through their employment spatial meaning was recreated. Hence, within a single temporal cycle such as a day, spatial meaning within the house and settlement would constantly have been redefined.

The shift in activities from within the house to the settlement necessarily involved changes in the spheres of social discourse. Interestingly, it is possible to interpret the spatial organization of the late Neolithic settlements, such as Barnhouse, as a homology of the house, in which an open central area provided the context of fire and material transformation. Many tasks, including pottery manufacture, bone tool production and secondary flint flaking were undertaken within this central area, mainly in its western confines. Again these activities may have been undertaken by women. As within the house, the symbolic definition of space was not static but contingent on different social practices and was therefore in a constant state of flux.

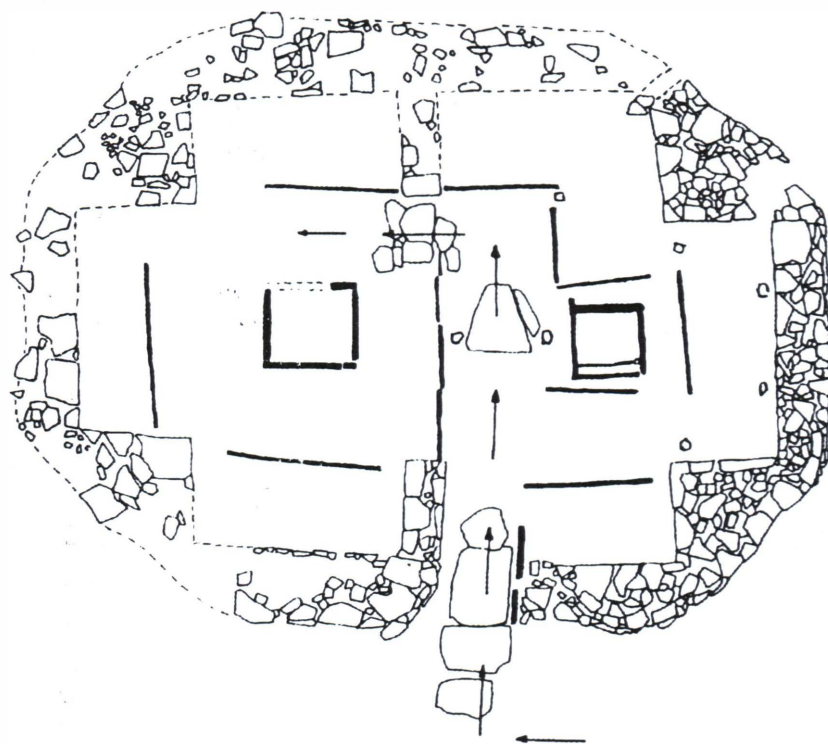


Figure 2. The direction of movement in House 2 at Barnhouse.

## Blackhouse parallels

A good example of such redefinition within a house of similar spatial organization is the Blackhouse of the Scottish Western Isles. Indeed, it was to the Blackhouse that Childe (1931: 183; 1946: 32) turned for ethnographic parallels to the Orcadian late Neolithic houses. When the family was together in the Blackhouse, a frequent occurrence during the long dark nights of the northern Scottish winter, the left side of the house was associated with the woman and it was here that she prepared food and undertook the majority of her work. The right-hand side was the domain of the man and similarly the place where he attended to different tasks and activities. However, this left/right distinction was replaced by a back/front division on other social occasions, such as the invitation of a guest into the house. The status of the guest was defined in the position offered around the central fireplace, by its proximity to the most distinguished position

directly behind the hearth and facing the entrance (Clarke and Sharples 1985: 70).

Having stressed the importance of the spatial organization of the house as a microcosm of the socially constructed world and the necessary links with wider spatial and temporal cycles, a broader understanding must be sought in terms of symbolic classifications. At this point, orientation and directionality may be introduced. It is suggested that the cruciform arrangement of the house relates to four Neolithic cardinal directions centred on the hearth.

## Solar orientation

An examination of the entrance orientation of houses at the villages of Barnhouse, Skara Brae and Rinyo reveals that 80 per cent lie on a north-west/south-east axis. This characteristic is also identifiable in the entrance orientation of Orcadian 'Maeshowe' passage graves. Returning to the houses, a larger sample number is



obtained if the alignment of individual hearths is examined, since frequently the hearth remains *in situ* when the rest of the house is demolished or destroyed. Because of the square shape of the hearths, the orientations will always relate to the four elements within the house interior (dresser, door and two beds). Clearly, the hearth maintains a uniformity of orientation (fig. 3), and the significance of these directions becomes more apparent when midwinter and midsummer sunrise and sunset are considered. Here we recognize a fusion of space and time embodied within the architecture of the house. Each element in the cruciform organization is a spatial referent to the key points in the annual cycles which govern both the agricultural cycles and social practices.

## Death and the west

The link between principles of order, as shown in architecture, and broader classifications, is clearly demonstrated with the passage grave of Maeshowe. Here a monument of the dead is oriented south-west, towards the setting midwinter sun which illuminates the interior of the tomb, marking the height of winter and the darkest day of the year. In the northern latitudes of Orkney there exists a marked contrast between the eighteen hours of sunshine at midsummer and eighteen hours of darkness at mid-winter. An association between death and a westerly direction may appear unsurprising, and in the architecture of the passage grave we see the selection and emphasis of certain categories pertaining to the 'house' of the dead: south-West, midwinter, darkness, cold and death. Most tombs, however, have east-facing entrances. In contrast to Maeshowe, movement into the tomb is from east to west. In terms of the homology between house and tomb, the innermost

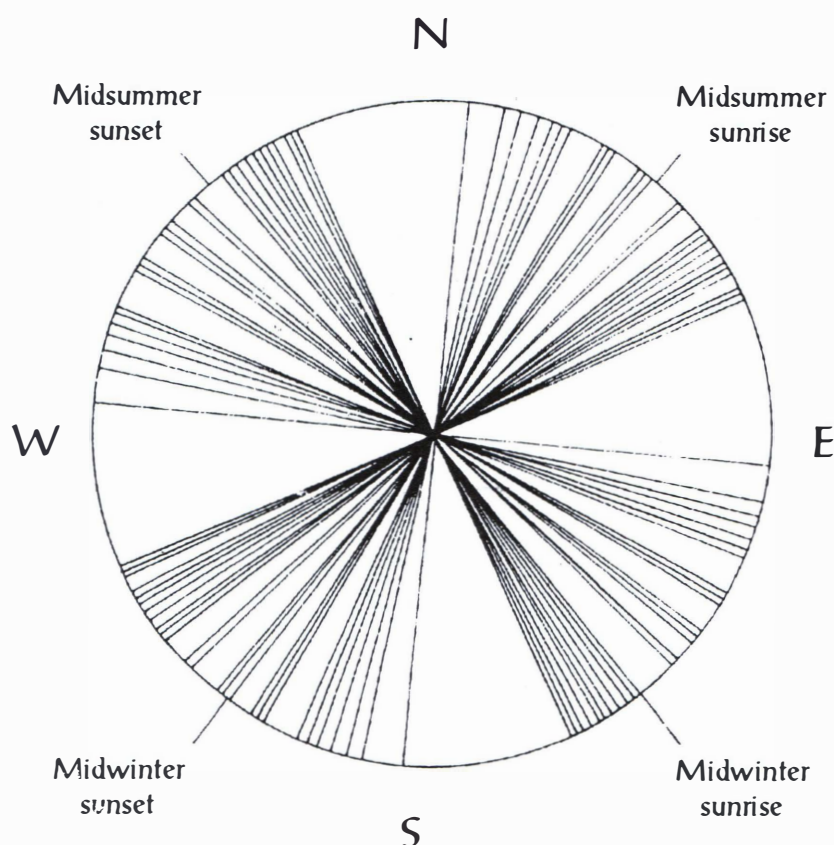


Figure 3. Orientation of central hearths in late Neolithic houses.

recess corresponds to the left side of the house.

Just like human action, classifications are not static but only take on concrete expression in certain places at certain times. Thus, while the architecture of Maeshowe marks the depth of winter, the sun's illumination of the inside heralds the beginning of a new cycle of regeneration.

The categories of order inherent within the architecture of the late Neolithic house in Orkney formed part of wider symbolic classifications embracing many spheres of meaning. Such meanings could only be mobilized through social practices. Not only did the undertaking of different activities at particular places within the house draw on this symbolism, but also the religious or cosmological principles of order which underlay its organization provided an ontological status to those actions which inevitably involved authority and

dominance. In the late Neolithic period of Orkney we can clearly recognize the reflexive nature and power of architecture.

## Further reading

For a broader discussion of architecture and cosmology in late Neolithic Orkney see:

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At the Edge

# "EVERY AGE GETS THE STONEHENGE IT DESERVES"

## *EH and NT condone £83 million bid for Stonehenge millennium park*

English Heritage has submitted an application to the Millennium Commission for funding for the Stonehenge Millennium Park. The £83 million scheme will clear the accumulated twentieth century clutter including the existing visitor centre, car park and the A344 road to create a Park free for ever from any sign of man's [sic] intrusion where the public will be encouraged to roam in safety and to walk among the Stones as their ancestors did for thousands of years. As well as the creation of a great prehistoric Park, a state-of-the-art Visitor Complex will be constructed outside the Stonehenge World Heritage Site. Following a Private Finance Initiative competition (PFI), the Tussauds Group Limited [Whose 'credentials' include such monuments of modern British tourism as Madame Tussauds waxworks museum, the London Planetarium, Warwick Castle and Alton Towers amusement park. R.N.T.] were selected by English Heritage and The National Trust as the preferred partner for the scheme.

English Heritage and the National Trust will form a new Stonehenge Trust to manage the Millennium Park. English Heritage will retain its responsibility to the nation for the safety of Stonehenge and

the 451 Scheduled Monuments in the landscape around it.

Sir Jocelyn Stevens, Chairman of English Heritage, said: "Every age gets the Stonehenge it deserves - or desires. We believe that Stonehenge deserves a similar investment of resources from society 5000 years later which reflects a pride in our heritage, a respect for the skills and intellect of our remote ancestors, a sense of continuity and a stimulus for the future. We have applied to the Millennium Commissioners because they are positively our last chance to match our investment and to save Stonehenge this millennium or forever." [Read: *The Government doesn't give a s.h.l.t. about this national disgrace. R.N.T.*]

In January/February 1997, the Millennium Commission will announce a 'long list' of applicants. Their final grant decision is not expected until June/July 1997. If our application is approved, construction could commence mid-1998 with completion in June 2000.

English Heritage press release  
 14th November 1996;  
 disseminated by the Council for British Archaeology's BritArch e-mail list.



# HOLLOW HILLS

Few archaeologists have been as skilled at identifying earthworks as the late Leslie Grinsell. But sometimes even he met with the unexpected. In 1934, during a survey of Surrey he called on Lord Camrose's place at Chertsey and mentioned a prior arrangement to view some barrows. Yes, they could be seen from out in the yard. He walked round the corner and there, lined up against the wall, every wheelbarrow on the estate stood ready for inspection (Grinsell 1987: 10).

After a few words of explanation, Grinsell strode on in his inimitable way (he never bothered with the temptations of private transport) towards Barrow Hills on the Chertsey-Egham border. Here three mounds had appeared as *threm burghen* in a charter of 672-4, and so they were duly scheduled in the county list as Chertsey nos. 1-3. But ironically, inspection later on showed them to be natural hillocks - landmarks which were no more archaeological than the wheelbarrows in the yard. Grinsell, like the estate workers, had been misled by a similarity of name.

Just because a site is referred to as a *beorh* in an Old English text does not mean that it was a gravemound. We should not even jump to the conclusion that it was the sort of hump or hillock that looks like a grave mound. King Alfred, after all, refers to the Alps as *beorgas* in his translation of Orosius, and though living at some distance from them he must have had an idea that they were not artificial.

JEREMY HARTE turns his attention to some misunderstandings regarding barrows and hollow hills. When not writing articles for *At the Edge* he is Curator of the Bourne Hall Museum, Ewell.

The 'mountains round about Jerusalem' of Psalm 125 were turned into *muntbeorgas* in translation. The word comes from Indo-European (IE) *\*bhergh*, 'height', and its original sense of 'high place' persists in later languages - the Celtic Brigantes were, literally or metaphorically, 'the high ones' (OED s.v. barrow, mount).

Old English (OE) *beorh* would long ago have disappeared from the language if it had not proved serviceable to archaeologists. Obsolete in written English by 1500, the word left four dialect descendants - in the North *barf*, 'a low ridge or hill'; in Sussex *berry*, 'a hillock'; in Anglo-Cornish *burrow*, 'a heap or hillock' (often of mining waste); and in Wessex *barrow*, 'a gravemound'. Ancient tumuli, rather than topography or tin-mining, were a proper object of study for gentlemen; besides, Aubrey's classic fieldwork was undertaken on Salisbury Plain; so the Wiltshire word won the day against its competitors.

## What's in a name?

Had the geography of scholarship been different, we would not be thinking of the gravemounds of the Bronze Age as 'barrows' at all. Camden in 1607 says 'they are called Lawes: the people round about say they were raised as

memorials to the slain' (OED s.v. law). He was drawing on research in Derbyshire where, until the 1860s, Peak District antiquaries continued loyally to refer to their sites as 'lows'. The word derives from OE *hlaew* which, like *beorh*, can in certain contexts describe a grave mound. But that is not its primary meaning, for *hlaew* comes from IE *\*klei*, 'to slope', and belongs to another group of words for hills. Some of the most imposing hills in the North are designated *law*, from Bolt's Law in Weardale to Cockburn Law in the Lammermuirs.

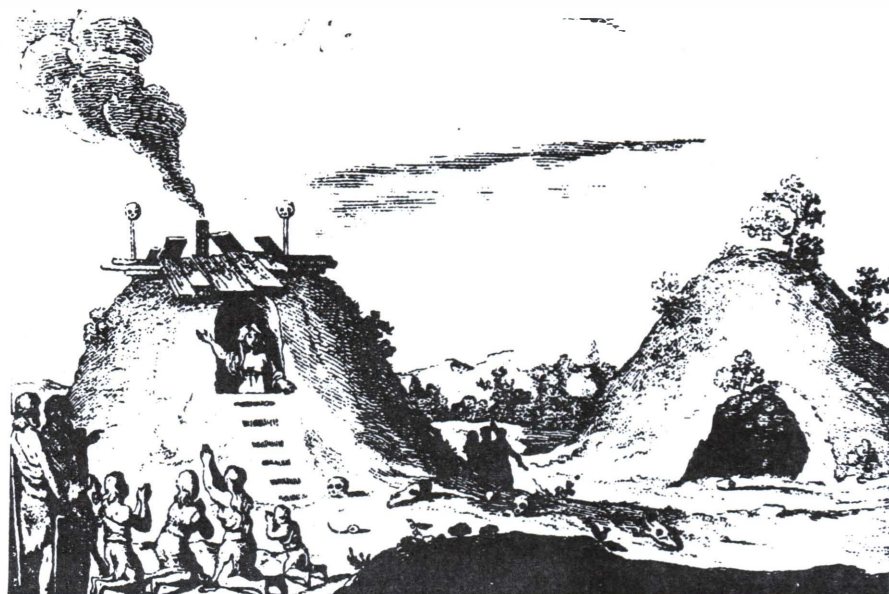
In southern England, a barrow was equally likely to be a hill (Mills 1986). Worbarrow Tout and Hambury Tout in Dorset are hills overlooking the sea; Dogbury is an isolated rise along the great chalk escarpment which divides Blackmore Vale from the Downs, while Bulbarrow stands at the highest point of that scarp and represents, if anything does, the omphalos of the county. Creech Barrow in Purbeck is a steep-sided, volcanic-looking hill, visible from a great distance. So is Colmers Hill, after which the village of Symondsbury is named. Barrow Hill in Lodders and Bugbarrow in Bere Regis are isolated small round hills.

The study of Old English topography from charters can be misleading; after all, they were written to define

boundaries, and the prudent surveyor will be more interested in small mounds than large hills when settling a border. Nevertheless, Grinsell conducted fieldwork in Berkshire specifically to test the suggestion that OE *beorh* in charters might mean a natural, not an artificial hill, and found that this was often so (Grinsell 1938).

Often enough, then, the 'broken barrow' of an old boundary is not a hero's grave pillaged for treasure, but a hill defaced by quarrying (Grundy 1919: 182). At first this comes over as a nuisance; one would like to have some less vague word as a hint to field archaeologists. But the apparent vagueness of *beorh* and *hlaew* is only a product of our own cultural preoccupations. We think that the Alps are different from the Three Barrows because we grade landscape features by size, from hillock to mountain, a practice introduced quite deliberately in the 1640s and dependant on the sort of familiarity with proportions required by landscape art (OED s.v. hill). Our ancestors, however, would have had great difficulty in understanding The Englishman Who Went Up A Hill But Came Down A Mountain - their topographical language being based on experience, not measurement. In the case of *beorh*, we are being told that the hill is one which can be seen from far off, or that you can stand on it and look into the far distance. It may be large or small; it may be natural or artificial; these are secondary considerations.

The early antiquaries, when trying to describe gravemounds to each other, were often at a loss which word to choose. Sir Thomas Browne speaks of 'artificial hills, mounts, or barrows' in correspondence with Dugdale, who had consulted two other scholars on the subject, none of them being certain what the monuments really were (Piggott 1988: 266). Lambarde in his description of Kent has to tell his readers that



The 'witte wyves' of Holland as barrow dwellers.

the hillocks in question are 'called Barowes . . . which signifieth Sepulchres' - playing on the pseudo-etymology of barrow from burial (Lambarde 1576/1826: 392). Leland, however, refers to gravemounds west of Exmoor by the local word *tors*, adding that they 'be round hillockes of yertli cast up of auncient tym for markes and limites', with never a mention of sepulture (Leland 1907: 168). As a rule, writers until the 1690s communicated the connection of barrows with burials as a fresh discovery, made either from Continental texts (Verstegan, or Wormius) or from personal investigation. From the Isle of Wight, Sir John Oglander noted triumphantly that 'buries' were 'hills whose name in ye Dairische tounge signifieth theyre nature . . . Dig and you shall find theyre bones' (Piggott 1989: 120). The experiment was tried by some with a more personal interest: in 1621 two speculators turned up in Dorchester, 'to dig in a hill at Upway . . . for some treasure that lies hidden underground', but three days' labour turned up 'nothing but a few bones' (Grinsell 1959: 69). Clearly they were surprised as well as disappointed at this skeletal result.

## Where the fairies dwell

If *beorh* had always meant a hill rather than a grave, it is easy to see how the passage of a thousand years might obliterate the memory that certain hills had once been raised over the dead. The notions of country people about barrows show little memory of their purpose: the *tumuli* on Bincombe Down, to which the disgruntled commissioners of 1621 trudged after wrecking Upwey, were known principally for the fairy music which could be heard from inside if you put your ear to the top at noon (Harte 1986: 40). Something similar was proposed by James Walsh, the cunning man of Netherbury, when hauled up before the authorities at Exeter in 1566 and asked how he was able to commune with the fairies. 'He speaketh with them upon hyls, where as there is great heapes of earth, as namely in Dorsetshire. And betwene the houres of xii and one at noone, or at midnight he vseth them' (Davies 1985: 62).

Earlier, in the fifteenth century, a recipe for summoning a fairy involves burying hazel wands 'under some hill whereas you suppose fayries haunt'. *Vixerunt ante Agamemnona*



*multi fortes* - many a magician was familiar with the fairies before the days of Bob Stewart, though they ran greater risks than he. In the 1670s a Yorkshire healer did his business 'with a white powder which, he said, he received from the Fairies, and that going to a Hill he knocked three times, and the Hill opened, and he had access to, and converse with a visible people'. He was acquitted, though not without the threat of a whipping (Briggs 1970: B1.404).

It seems that fairy hills, like the Tardis, are larger inside than out. Isobel Gowdie 'went in to the Downie hills: the hill opened, and we came to a fair and large braw room in the day time. There are elf bulls routing and skoyling there at the entry, which feared me'. She would have been better off keeping her fear for the world outside, where she was convicted and burnt in 1662 (Murray 1931: 57). Another woman accused of witchcraft, to the far north in Orkney, confessed to seeing a fairy people rise out of the hill called Greinfall as they made their way to feast at the expense of mortals during Yule (Dalyell 1835: 532-3). In 1613 Isobel Halfdane of Perth was carried out of her bed and into a fairy hill, where she stayed for three days learning secret knowledge (Hole 1957: 73). On hills above Lanark and Kilmaurs, John Stewart was initiated by the king of the fairies into the Black Art (Scott 1830: 160). And in about 1670 George Burton spoke to a very self-possessed ten-year-old at Leith, who showed off his drumming skills and announced that 'every Thursday night I beat all points to a sort of people that use to meet under yonder hill (pointing to the great hill between Edenborough and Leith)'. Next Thursday night he was closely guarded, but the boy had prudently acquired enough of the skills of his friends to vanish unperceived from the room about midnight, and the neighbourhood never saw him again (Briggs 1970 B1.219).

Among the arts of the seventeenth-century 'walker between the worlds', then, was a knowledge of fairy hills. Some of these were what we would call hills, some were what we would call barrows: fairies and magicians, like the Anglo-Saxons, saw no difference between them. Modern scholars, however, have made heavier weather of it. Right from the foundation of the Folklore Society there was competition as to who should come up with the true solution to the problem of fairy origins. They never did, of course, since the problem existed only in their own heads: the existence of the supernatural is not a conundrum to be resolved like a game of Cluedo. But everyone had fun trying, including Grant Allen, author of the now forgotten free-thinking *Evolution of the Idea of God*. He proposed that fairies were ghosts - or rather, as he did not believe in ghosts, memories - of the Neolithic dead: because Neolithic people were buried in barrows, fairies were seen at barrows (Allen 1881). The theory has enjoyed some popularity, on and off, ever since (Spence 1946). Is there anything to it?

Aarne-Thompson motif F211.0.1, 'barrow as fairy dwelling', is certainly common in recent folklore. Leslie Grinsell - taking time off from finding ancient sites to recording their legends - quotes about twenty instances in Britain, together with various forts, brochs, duns, and mesolithic shell-mounds haunted by the Good People (Grinsell 1976). Unfortunately the prevalence of sites which are not gravemounds tends to diminish the significance of those which are, and this eclecticism becomes even more apparent when we include others which are not prehistoric at all into the reckoning. The Fairy Hill at Bishopston was due to be levelled, when the pick and shovel men heard a voice from within say, 'Is all well?'. 'Yes', they stammered. 'Then keep well when you are well'.

bellowed the voice, 'and leave the Fairy Hill alone'. Thanks to this intervention it still stands, making it possible for field investigators to identify it as a twelfth-century castle motte (Westwood 1985: 400). In fact many of the most celebrated fairy mounds are not archaeological at all. The Fairy Hill at Aberfoyle has achieved a certain notoriety as the place where the Rev Robert Kirk died, or seemed to die, two years after drafting *The Secret Commonwealth*. In that work he had said a great deal about the ways of the hidden people, and no-one was surprised when his spirit afterwards appeared to announce its captivity within their stronghold. But the Fairy Hill is a natural knoll (Kirk 1893: 21).

## Travellers' tales

Any attempt to connect fairy hills with haunted gravemounds must meet the objection that, in historic times at least, people did not know that barrows were gravemounds; the process of association must therefore be a very early one. If this were so one would expect barrows to predominate in the earliest literature, hills in the later stories. The reverse is true. Although barrows are common in recent oral tradition, seven out of the eight accounts gathered from the witchcraft era relate to hills; and when, in the same generation, Aubrey has a tale of entry into Faerie, it involves a cave such as that at Borough hill in Frensham, or a natural rise such as Hackpen Hill at Avebury (Aubrey 1719: 3.366; Grinsell 1976: 116). In the ballad of True Thomas, the road to fair Elfland lies through a hill, identified by tradition with the massive peaks of the Eildon Hills, and this ballad derives from a fifteenth-century romance (Westwood 1985: 452-8). The Welsh life of St Collen - another fifteenth-century romance, now popularly presented as ancient Celtic wisdom - locates the underworld palace of Gwynn ap Nudd

within Glastonbury Tor (Baring-Gould 1913: 4.376).

Going back further in time, we have a cluster of stories from twelfth-century chroniclers about people who entered a mysterious Otherworld from somewhere in the British isles. The heroes are King Herla, Elidyr the priest, William Peveril's swineherd, an East Riding rustic and a Gloucestershire hunter: they adventure through, respectively, a cave, a tunnel, a cave, a barrow and a hill (Briggs 1977; Westwood 1985). The story of the barrow is told by William of Newborough, about Willy Howe, a massive Neolithic mound within the 'Great Wolds sacred landscape' (Haigh 1994). Here a rustic was wobbling his way back home from a party c.1150 when he heard the sound of singing and dancing coming from within. 'Perceiving in the side of the hill an open door, he approached, and, looking in, he beheld the house, spacious and lighted up, filled with men and women, who were seated, as it were, at a solemn banquet'. One of the attendants brought him a cup which, after the graceless manner of mortal men, he stole.

Gervase of Tilbury, writing thirty years later, steals the story itself and transfers it to the Forest of Dean, where there are no barrows; instead the scene takes place on a mount in a forest glade. There are Scandinavian versions in which the sacramental implications of the cup are developed for, as Tony Roberts pointed out, the story is one about the transference of magical power, not food and drink (Roberts 1977). But as far as locale is concerned, hollow barrows occur as only one among many entries to the world of Faerie.

## Sir Gawain's Green Chapel

Nevertheless, the descriptions of Otherworldly places have often been collated with archaeological evidence.



Approaching the fairy mound. From Olaus Magnus.

Towards the end of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the hero makes his way to the appointed tryst at the Green Chapel, and can find no such place:

*'save a lyttel on a launde, a law  
as it were,*

*A balw berw bi a bonke the  
brymme bysyde . . .*

*Hit hade a hole on the end and  
on ayther syde,*

*And overgrown with gresse in  
glodes aywhere;*

*And al was holw inwith, nobot  
an olde cave'*

*'but a little way off on the level  
there was a kind of low,*

*A smooth barrow on a bank  
sloping down to the  
brook . . .*

*It had a hole at the end and one  
to either side,*

*And grass grew over it all in  
great clumps;*

*Inside it was hollow and only an  
old cave'. (2171–2182)*

The use of words derived from *beorh* and *hlaew* has disposed commentators to see this site as a tumulus - presumably some kind of chamber tomb with sidepassages. But barrow and low are simply synonyms for 'hill' - indeed the site is 'that hyghe hil' a few lines later (2199). The Green Chapel may be pure imagination, but local historians have found a cave-pitted knoll called

Thurshole or Fiend's House, near Wetton, that fits the bill very well (Stewart and Matthews 1989: 98–9).

## Improbable tales

To see any English legend as having derived from imaginative response to a chambered tomb is premature until alternative explanations have been ruled out. At Torbarrow Hill near Cirencester, for instance, two men are reported in 1685 to have 'discovered an entrance into the hill, where they found several rooms with their furniture'. That is exciting - one immediately thinks of them stumbling across something out of the Cotswold-Severn group. But the story goes on, getting wilder, with Roman urns, coins, groaning heads, and a figure in armour that strikes out the light. The details are taken from mediaeval legends of the magician Gerbert, probably via the *Gesta Romanorum*, and there is no long barrow at the site. Instead, the two men challenge credulity by claiming to have entered the hill itself, sinking a gravel pit twelve feet down and then working sideways. The fact that pamphlets of this kind were frequently made up by some London publisher a hundred miles away does not



help our unbelief much either (Grinsell 1976: 143-4; Westwood 1985: 320-2).

## Unknown hollow hills

The persistent legends of secret passages into hollow hills invite links with the megalithic legacy of chambered tombs, because these are . . . well, secret passages into hollow hills. And the wonders of modern photography have made us all familiar with the key sites; when Janet Bord writes, 'it is quite an experience to enter one of these', we can see at once what she means (Bord and Bord 1986: 27).

But would medieval, or Roman, or Iron Age people have shared that experience? Even today, after archaeological restoration has done its best, there are not many sites in England and Wales where a tunnel leads into the hill. The industrious Jacquetta Hawkes notes 'torch needed' for only five. They are West Kennet, Stoney Littleton, Hetty Peglers Tump, Barclodiad y Gawres, and Bryn Celli Ddu (Hawkes 1986). Some if not all of these were sealed until recently; West Kennet was first broken into in the 1690s, and the passageway was not covered again until 1859; Stoney Littleton remained intact until 1816. Nine times out of ten the fate of a chambered tomb was to have its mound robbed and the capstones of the passage and side chambers slid away for building purposes. The original entrances had been covered not long after the disuse of the sites by earth slipping from the mound, so that it is fair to say that between 2500 BC and AD 1800 no-one in southern Britain had access to the geomantic experience now enjoyed, or abused, by visitors to West Kennet.

This is not to suggest that the great mounds of the Neolithic were not venerated for long ages after their construction. It is just that none of the later worshippers had any idea what was inside them. At Newgrange a golden hoard of Roman

workmanship was buried, and coins were offered, by strangers from outside the Irish world - presumably local people were also making gifts, but of more perishable things. All these offerings were made, however, around the standing stones before the tomb, while its decorated kerbstones and entrance passage remained hidden under earth until the mound was cleared in 1699. Knowth is surrounded by burials of many dates, from Iron Age to mediaeval, but although these show what veneration there was for the mound, their effect was to block its entry into the hill rather than revealing it: early Christian and Viking barrow-raids were followed by renewed collapse (Brennan 1983: 18, 27; Raftery 1994: 180, 196, 210).

There is a paradox here. As a physical object, Newgrange was, until 1699, a rather ragged looking hill with some stones at the foot of it, and to all appearances was no more hollow than Ben Bulbin. But as an Otherworldly place, the Bru na Boinne, it was not only hollow inside but positively capacious, containing *inter alia* the Dagda, his son Oengus and Oc, three fruit trees which were always in fruit, an inexhaustible cauldron, and three times fifty sons of kings (Brennan 1983: 10-14). Moreover it contained these things as a hill, not as a tomb or gravemound. When dispossessed by the sons of Mil, the Tuatha De Danann went into the hills, or *sidhe*, becoming the People of the Hills, the *Aes Sidhe*. They did not die but transformed themselves into a invisible people (Kittredge 1886: 195-7). The epics are quite clear about this and, as the epics contain a great many people who do die, and are buried in ordinary graves, it would seem as if they knew the difference. Not until the eleventh century, when Christian redactors tried to make sense of the situation,

was it suggested that the Bru na Boinne marked the graves of the kings of Tara and not the supernatural court of the living Oengus - a theory intended to repress, not express, the popular belief (O'Kelly 1982: 45-6).

## Back to Britain

The folk tales of Britain do not aspire to heroic fantasy on the Irish model, but they have their moments. Child Rowland, setting out from Carlisle towards Elfland, comes to a round green hill terraced from top to bottom, walks round it three times widdershins and calls for the door to open. It leads to a long passage, studded like a rough grotto with gems. At the end he finds himself in a vast hall, a room whose magnificence left the plain Aberdeenshire storyteller at a loss for words, but he thought it might be something like Pluscardin Abbey before its ruin - only with gold, silver and pearls substituted for mere Gothic masonry. From the arched vault hung a carbuncle which by magic illuminated the room, and by its light Child Rowland saw his lost sister, and the king of Elfland, whom he slew (Briggs 1970: A1.180).

## On to Orkney

Joseph Jacobs suggested that the fairy hill in Child Rowland might be a distant memory of chambered tombs such as Maes Howe, and in more recent times Tony Roberts has developed the theme (Jacobs 1890: 241-4; Roberts 1986). If so, the legend has made several architectural improvements on its prototype; but Jacobs is pertinent in singling out Maes Howe, for alone among the monuments of its kind, this can be shown to have stood open in the mediaeval period. The twelfth-century runes on its walls record, in ambiguous fashion, that someone called Hakon bore the treasure out of the mound, three nights before 'they' (whoever they were)

broke into it. The breaking must have been done from the top downwards, with ladders, and not via the passage, for many of the runes are carved above head height. The runemasters had time and light enough to make a neat job of their work. Maes Howe was eventually sealed again, perhaps after the occasion recorded in the *Orkneyinga Saga* when two men went mad after staying there overnight, for reasons not stated (Grinsell 1976: 186-7).

## 'Grappling with the dead man within'

In later years the mound was haunted by something called a hogboy, which turns out to be the Norn version of Norse *haugbui*, 'barrow-wight'. Gravemounds in Scandinavia are haunted by these creatures, and rocks or crags by the *bergbui*; we also hear of *alfar* who, like the Scots elves and English fairies, could be consulted on magical errands. In *Kormaks Saga* the witch ordi sends a man in need of healing to 'a hillock not far from here, in which dwell elves; take the

bull which Kormakr slew, and redden the outside of the hill with bull's blood, and make the elves a feast with the flesh; and you will be healed' (Ellis 1943: 111). The similarities with British rituals are clear, but the difference lies in the fact that the Norse *haugr* would contain, and be known to contain, an ancestral burial; there are in fact a great many stories about the hero descending into some *howe* in search of treasure, and there grappling with the dead man within. Such an animated corpse, or *draugr*, is a figure of horror and not to be compared with the peaceful and benevolent dead, usually ancestral kings, who responded with good luck and fertility to the living when people venerated their mounds.

Olaf of Geirstad received offerings made on his gravemound, and for that reason was known as an *alf* - which very much suggests that the dead man was seen as approximating to the world of natural spirits, and that the spirits were not simply an extended group of dead men. Mound-spirits were part of a larger company haunting

geomantic sites, the other types having no connection with the burial of the dead. In Christian Norway it was forbidden to believe (and therefore evidently was believed) that the *landvaettir* lived in groves, waterfalls and *haugar*. The early Icelandic settlers, shortly after landing, made compacts with certain Otherworldly beings living under stones and hills. This cannot have been a cult of the ancestors, for there were as yet no ancestors to cultivate (Turville-Petre 1964: 193, 237).

In the lands washed by the northern seas, north and west of Scotland, two streams of tradition seem to be flowing side by side. On Orkney and Shetland the *alfar* venerated by the first Norse settlers have become the trows, and their hills are known as trowie knowes; these beings are ugly and sullen, but in other respects conform to fairy lore (Marwick 1975: 33-42). In the Western Isles, and along the coast to Caithness, the same hills are known as *sitheans*, and they are inhabited by the People of Peace - who have about them something of the beauty and dignity of the Gaelic tradition,

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but are otherwise, again, typical fairies (Campbell 1900: 11–14). Some trowie knowes and some *sitheans* are ancient burial mounds but this is not necessarily the case. The two classes of monument are in any event geomantically identical and equally frequent in both areas.

What strikes me as curious is that the Norse colonists of Orkney and Shetland had been accustomed to bury their dead in gravemounds right up until the introduction of Christianity in the eleventh century, while the Gaelic settlers in the Hebrides came from regions where barrow burial had been virtually unknown for two thousand years. Yet you could not discern any such difference in their fictions, or insights, about haunted mounds. It is enough to persuade me that the folklore of barrows does not derive, as many a comfortable academic author has suggested, from memories of their historic role or prehistoric origin, but from something else entirely. Inquiries in this field have been subdued of late. When the Rev Robert Kirk returns from his involuntary researches under the Fairy Hill at Aberfoyle, perhaps he will favour us with a second edition.

## A postscript

Throughout this article I have referred to the work of both Leslie Grinsell and Tony Roberts, and the allusions could have been multiplied, for both men were crucial in their own ways to the developments of geomythics - to use Tony's own word. Without all the diligent work by the one, and the prophetic voice of the other, my own researches would never have begun, and I can only regret that now I cannot talk to either of them on the subjects we shared. For death comes, and what use are a few books on the shelf without the friends who wrote them? But bless them both,

the giant and the barrow-wight, wherever they are, and let this note stand as one more tribute to what they achieved.

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# Research in Geomancy 1990-1994

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# 5,000 YEAR-OLD 'DEATH PLATFORM'

Archaeologists have discovered what is thought to be a 5,000 year old 'excarnation platform' where the dead bodies of pre-historic Man were left to rot and be picked clean by predators, at Stoney Middleton in the Peak District National Park, Derbyshire.

The dramatic discovery came towards the end of a daring rescue mission to excavate two Bronze Age barrows which are slipping down a 150ft sheer drop into Longstone Rake.

One of only two 'sky burial' sites discovered in England, the death platform, which contained hundreds of human teeth and bones, is the first to be dated accurately - to the Middle Neolithic period (around 3,000 BC) - and is believed to have been used for funeral rites for 1,000 years.

Dr Andrew Brown, Ancient Monuments Inspector for English Heritage, said: 'This is a terrifically important and exciting find. It fills a gap in the jigsaw puzzle of Neolithic life and death in the Peak District.'

'A number of Neolithic final burial sites have been discovered nearby - Minninglow, Five Wells and Tideslow - but never before have we found the related sites at which bodies were placed to be picked clean prior to final burial'.

The excavation, by a team of hand-picked archaeologists, has revealed a one to two feet high limestone, semi-circular rubble wall, beneath one of the Bronze Age barrows. The wall, which enclosed the platform, had three standing stones in front of its entrance. The opening was later closed using slightly smaller rubble.

Vital supporting evidence includes the discovery of the tiny bones of hundreds of small animals, such as frogs and rodents, which archaeologists believe were deposited at the site in the droppings of owls or other birds of prey attracted to the decaying flesh.

An unusually large number of water vole bones were found at the site, probably caught by birds of prey and eaten or digested at the exposure platform. Archaeologists are investigating the reason for such a high concentration of vole bones in the area.

Longstone Rake is part of High Rake limestone escarpment, a landscape rich in archaeological remains from many periods, which rises 391 metres above sea level, in the Peak District National Park. The southern edge of the escarpment, at Longstone, has been mined since the Middle Ages, originally for lead.

Owned by Laporte Minerals, the quarry is now mined for fluorspar but centuries of mining has caused deep cracks and subsidence in the ground above the quarry where the barrows are precariously situated.

The excarnation platform probably fell into disuse when belief systems changed and people began to retain their individuality and be revered after death.

Three Bronze Age human skeletons, together with a 'beaker' pot and other grave goods, were excavated from a central burial pit dug into the platform. This pit was later heaped with rubble, forming the familiar rounded shape of the barrow. They were not necessarily high-status

individuals but were obviously important.

The skeletons, soil and pottery samples will be sent to the Universities of Bristol and Sheffield for genetic and dietary analysis. Sampling techniques will include a relatively new breakthrough in dating studies - <sup>14</sup>C dating of fatty residues - and it is hoped that trace indicators and food deposits will provide further information about early human diet.

A second Bronze Age barrow contained less striking evidence. It had already been opened by the nineteenth century Derbyshire antiquarian Thomas Bateman who left his signature, a small lead plaque, in the burial pit. The opportunity to re-excavate his trench and the rest of the barrow has further enhanced our understanding of his methods and may allow more to be made of his records.

Dr Brown said: 'In more normal circumstances, this area would have been scheduled as an ancient monument but we have had to act quickly to stop this vital information being lost forever. We could not have done it without help from the Peak District National Park and Laporte Minerals. I am delighted with the partnership which has helped us record this bit of Derbyshire's heritage'.

Ken Smith, Archaeologist with the Peak District National Park said: 'This research is essential to our understanding of burial practices in the area and placing the site more precisely in its chronological, cultural and landscape context.'

English Heritage press release  
15th October 1996, disseminated  
by CBA's BritArch e-mail list.

*'Far away is close at hand  
in images of elsewhere'*

# A peep at TAG 96

The Theoretical Archaeological Group conference 1996 - TAG 96 to everyone - raises the daunting prospect of about 200 lectures in under three days. It is physically impossible to attend more than a small proportion as most of the time no less than six sessions are running in parallel. This article attempts to summarise some of the papers which stimulated me - although I am well aware, from talking to other delegates, that I missed many equally good presentations.

The quotation in the title of this article is intended to reflect the emphasis of a number of different papers given at TAG 96, which all revealed an increasing importance of the 'Otherness' of the past - a recognition that other cultures do not share the same ways of thinking about, say, place or time as modern Western society. However, the quotation is not taken from an eminent professor, or even from some bright post-graduate, but is to be found inscribed in the fabric of Liverpool University. Amid insights into more scatological matters, this apt wisdom was revealed to me on the back of a door in the gents toilets.

Such traditional means of communication have, however, been supplanted by considerably more high-tech processes. Recent excavations at Catal Huyuk, the early neolithic settlement in Turkey, were recorded daily on a massive

computer database that incorporated not only details of the finds themselves but also the excavators' candid diaries and many videos taken during the dig. Some of this data was published via the World Wide Web and other information was processed by computer whiz kids into virtual reality (VR) models of the site - and a VR museum with an exhibition devoted to Catal Huyuk.

Whether the final result is simply information overload plus exciting computer simulations, or whether it really represents a better way of working is further complicated by the fact that an anthropologist was working alongside the archaeologists at Catal Huyuk, studying the way they went about their work, and how they interacted with both each other and with the local people assisting with the excavation work. Another anthropologist was studying how the local people regard the ancient monuments in and around Catal Huyuk - and revealed an entirely different set of meanings and values from those of the outsiders.

As if this does not sound sufficiently multi-disciplinary, the papers relating to Catal Huyuk also included contributions by a psychologist, discussing the meaning of the prominent breast-like features decorating some of the houses, and from an historian, Ronald Hutton, describing how the associations made by the early excavators of

Catal Huyuk and the cult of Neolithic 'Great Goddess' were entirely in keeping with a wider body of academic thinking earlier this century - even though the evidence for such a cult is now regarded as shaky or non-existent.

## Shamans 'domesticated' cattle

An even more unexpected speaker at the Catal Huyuk session was David Lewis-Williams, best known for his pioneering work on altered states of consciousness and southern African rock art. He suggested that the evidence for the domestication of cattle at Catal Huyuk - among the earliest known examples of such domestication - could suggest that the society included prominent shamans. His argument was based on the observation that shamans are closely associated with their 'spirit animals', who empower the shamans. If the spirit animals could be 'corralled', this would on the one hand mean that the spiritual power of those animals was readily at hand for the shamans and, at the same time, be a demonstration to the rest of the society of the power of the shaman over the animals. The fact that the 'domesticated' cattle then readily provided milk was, in Lewis-Williams' opinion, at this stage a convenient 'by product'.



Lewis-Williams drew attention to several other features of the Catal Huyuk houses - for instance, that access was not through doors but via ladders from the roofs - that suggest the builders were trying to create an 'underworld' analogous to the use of caves elsewhere. The vulture-like birds (some with human legs) in the wall paintings also strongly suggest an interest in Otherworldly flight. The creation of a three-tier cosmology (underworld, physical world and upper world) is invariably associated with shamanic societies throughout the world.

In passing, Lewis-Williams noted that excarnation (for which there is some evidence at Catal Huyuk although it is not the dominant funerary method) is suggestive of the death-dismemberment-rebirth characteristic of shamanic initiations. Another paper, in a different session dealing with the British neolithic, made a passing comment that the upper surfaces of the capstones of Irish wedge tombs (and perhaps the capstones of other dolmen-like neolithic tombs) could have been used as excarnation platforms, with the clean bones finally being interred inside the tomb.

But such passing references to shamanism were as nothing compared to the half-day session on prehistoric rock art. As might be expected, re-interpreting these images as evidence for altered states of consciousness seems to have reached endemic proportions - from southern Africa to North America and back to Ireland and over to southern Spain, everywhere the so-called 'entoptic patterns' are recognised and what were once described as 'everyday scenes' become evidence for far more mind-bending scenarios.

## Colourful cairns

By contrast, the session on neolithic Scotland made, so far as I recall, no mention of shamanism. However, several

papers made some exciting suggestions. Richard Bradley had spoken at TAG a year ago on the chambered tombs at Clava (see *At the Edge* No.2 p25-6) and noted that, not only do the entrances of two of the tombs align with the midwinter sunset, but the stones facing the setting sun are predominantly red. Fieldwork this summer had looked further at the colour of the stones used and found that red sandstone and white, quartz-rich stones were deliberately alternated - although the greying effect of lichen growing on the stones now obscures much of this contrast.

Not all cairns at Clava incorporated red stones - there was a progressive difference between the cairns which align on the midwinter sunset (where red was used extensively) and the other cairns to the north-east where red was less frequently used.

A subsequent paper by Andy Jones demonstrated that on the Isle of Arran it was not only red and white stones which were intentionally used, but also a distinctive black igneous rock which outcrops in the middle of the island. Quite what these three colours meant in the Neolithic is unclear but Jones suggested that white represented bone and red the flesh and blood. Although not part of Jones' paper, it came to my mind that the same three colours are associated with traditional magic in northern Europe and Scandinavia. For instance, Kati-Ma Koppana's *Snakefat and Knotted Threads* (Mandragora 1990), describes how red, white and black threads were used in traditional Finnish healing until recent times.

## Hooray for Hollywood

All fascinating stuff, but nowhere near as fascinating as the paper by Kenny Brophy of Glasgow University on the cursus monuments near the Scottish town of Hollywood. The most conspicuous prehistoric

monument in this area is the Twelve Apostles stone circle, although crop mark photographs have revealed a possible henge, two cursuses and an alignment of pits. One of the cursuses aligns with the possible henge and the pit alignment is oriented towards the confluence of two small rivers.

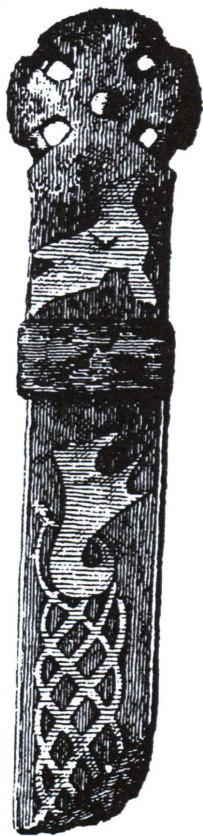
The other cursus aligns on the Twelve Apostles circle and the midwinter sunset. Walking along the line of this cursus towards the stone circle means crossing the end of the cursus aligned on the henge. Then, just as the stone circle is little more than two hundred yards away, it disappears from view as the valley of a small stream 'intervenes'. No doubt the whole phenomena would be even more dramatic at the time of midwinter sunset.

## Anglo-Saxon 'totem poles'

After all this prehistory, time for the Anglo-Saxons. The decorated cross shafts of Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Leicestershire were first studied in detail by W.G. Collingwood. He proposed a chronology based on the absence or presence of Scandinavian motifs - suggesting pre-Viking and post-Viking dates, respectively, and with a finer graduation of dates based on how 'degenerate' the designs had become. This system was put forward in the early years of this century and has become the standard system. New discoveries are dated by reference to Collingwood's original examples. But, as anyone who investigates carvings soon discovers, such dating is circular in that one example is said to be, say, ninth century because another carving is said to be ninth century. When one investigates the second carving, that is said to be ninth century because a similar one is said to be ninth century - and the loops soon become self-referential.

An archaeologist with the Peak National Park, Phil Sidebottom, has spent about ten years studying the Anglo-Saxon cross shafts and the design motifs. He discovered that the motifs are specific to particular regions, with only one motif overlapping into an adjoining region. He then looked at the reconstruction of the Anglo-Saxon tribal hidages (such as Elmet, Peacstan and the subdivisions of Mercia) - and the distribution of design motifs fitted well with the hidages. More specifically, the crosses were erected at the centres of these land units - Eyam, Bakewell, Bradbourne, Wirksworth, etc.

As if this was not a significant breakthrough, one the basis of independent dating evidence available for one of the cross shafts, it seems that *all* these were carved between 911 and



One of the most easterly of the Anglo-Saxon 'totem poles', from Spoxton, Leicestershire (as illustrated in J. Nichol's *History and Antiquities of the county of Leicester*, 1790s).

950. This means that even the crosses *without* Anglo-Scandinavian motifs are post-Viking. The reason for their construction seems to be tied in with acceptance of Christianity and were intended to be surpassing symbols of the acceptance by the Anglo-Saxon overlords of inextricable links with the Roman Church.

## Archaeology and folklore

Given the specific aims of *At the Edge*, the all-day session on 'archaeology and folklore' was a must. Frankly, most of the papers were a disappointment - there have certainly been many better presentations at *The Ley Hunter Moots* over the years.

The less disappointing papers were studies of specific aspects - such as Miranda Green's consideration of the way knowledge of Greek Classical mythology may have affected the 'meaning giving to cauldrons in the early medieval Irish myths.

The speakers that aimed for wider scope seemed to miss the mark. Fortunately a summing up of the morning session by Robert Layton of Durham University managed to retrieve some of the lost emphasis. As he noted, from the viewpoint of archaeologists, folklore is an alternative way of representing the meaning of, say, ancient monuments. More specifically, folklore has an entirely different way of representing time than that of the modern Western mentalities (of which archaeologists are an indisputable example). Equally distinct from modern thinking is the way folklore distinguishes between the mundane and the Otherworldly.

## Folklore as cognitive systems

While some readers may object to the use of such 'jargon' as 'cognitive systems', Layton was able to summarise this

neatly when he observed that folklore provides three interlinked cognitive systems for representing (a) space/landscape; (b) process and time; and (c) the everyday v. the Other. These cognitive systems in turn enable folklore to provide value systems for vestiges of the past - not least, which events or physical remains enter into folklore and the way in which they are represented.

Layton also raised some warnings. Firstly, folklore may not directly reflect everyday practice - it may *invert* the meaning to denote an 'Otherworldly' meaning. He also noted that neither functionalist or structuralist methodologies are 'fool proof' when dealing with folklore.

## Feminism, paganism and pluralism

The afternoon session of the 'archaeology and folklore' contained the best-informed of all these papers. Lynn Meskell of Cambridge University gave a paper entitled 'Feminism, paganism, pluralism'. She began by noting that in post-processual archaeology all ideas are supposedly welcomed and a plurality of positions are considered necessary. In this post-modern, 'multi-vocal milieu' the voices of feminists, eco-feminists, archaeo-feminists, goddess worshippers and pagans are as legitimate as scholarly accounts of the past. However, the reality is quite distinct, with scholastic disciplinary boundaries remaining intact.

Ms Meskell closed her paper with the following perceptive remarks: 'Whether it is Margaret Murray and Egypt, Jane Ellen Harrison or Arthur Evans for Greece, Jacquetta Hawkes or Marija Gimbutas and Europe, or James Mellart's Catal Huyuk archaeology, wicca, paganism and Goddess veneration share a long and interwoven trajectory. Taking the Huttonian hard line,



academics themselves may have unwittingly been the founders of a new religion. Can we legitimately indite the fringe when they have simply been following archaeologists, albeit somewhat outdated ones? I would suggest that disciplinary and alternative archaeology share a long, sometimes fruitful, yet often unhappy relationship. Often times they fail to acknowledge each other, or recognise their reliance and responsibility. In that sense real pluralism has a long way to go, before it transcends tokenism and trendiness. However, the

starting point for all these groups has always been the evocative nature of the material remains from the past and the people of antiquity, it is to them that our greatest responsibility lies.'

## Finally: The Apocalypse

The final paper of the 'archaeology and folklore' session and, so far as I was concerned, of TAG96 as a whole, was by Kathryn Denning of Sheffield University. The title

of her paper would seem to have been more appropriate to a Psychic Questing conference than TAG: 'Apocalypse past/future: archaeology, destiny and revealed wisdom'. Indeed, she looked at the books produced by a number of 'fringe' writers who might feel quite at home in the environs of a PQ do - but noted that their concerns are now being matched by some academic archaeologists.

As all of us are becoming increasingly aware, the popular media are beginning to reveal signs of 'pre-millennial tension'. Adrian Gilbert and Maurice Cotterell's *The Mayan Prophecies* (1995) is an international bestseller which revolves around 'secret wisdom' and the end of world which, if their interpretation of the Mayan calendrical system is correct, will mean that the greatest catastrophe that mankind has ever known will take place in 2012.

The ancient Egyptians were also kind enough to encode in their monuments an apocalyptic message for those living several millennia later, according to Robert Bauval and Graham Hancock's *Keeper of Genesis* (1996). But an equally apocalyptic message can be found in the writings of the academically-respectable Paul Bahn and John Flenley who subtitled their book *Easter Island, Earth Island* (1992) as 'a message from our past for the future of our planet'. In short, the archaeologists' investigation of the ecological disaster on Easter Island saw this as essentially man-made and a parallel to what could happen to the whole planet.

Archaeologists are just beginning to become self-conscious of the ways which their work incorporates modern ideas such as power and gender; Ms Denning suggests that they should also be more aware of the eschatological implications of the stories they tell. Given that the Biblical sense of the word 'apocalypse' is 'revelation', perhaps Denning is correct in concluding that 'archaeology and apocalypse may in fact be one and the same'.



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# CRETE RECLAIMED

## A Feminist Exploration of Bronze Age Crete

Susan Evasdaughter

Illustrations by Billie Walker-John

Foreword by Rodney Castleden

Author of *Minoans: life in bronze age Crete* and *The Knossos Labyrinth*



Between about 3000 and 1400 BC one of the world's great civilizations flourished on the island of Crete. Early excavators thought the civilisation was ruled by King Minos and termed the era 'Minoan Crete'. This unfortunate error is still perpetrated although this book argues that there is no evidence for any prominent males in bronze age Crete.

From the foreword by  
Rodney Castleden:

"At a time in the West when the long-suffered, traditional role of women in society as subjugated subordinates has been challenged and the bars of gender-bias have been severely shaken and cracked, it is particularly

useful to look back at this other society, that of bronze age Crete, and see just what sort of civilization was built upon 'feminine' values."

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### Chanting in the chamber tombs

Were the megalithic chamber tombs designed to resonant to the sound of chanting? Preliminary research by the former editor of *The Ley Hunter* at six neolithic sites in UK and Ireland and an iron age *souterrain* in Cornwall suggests that they are all especially resonant.

P. Devereux and R.G. Jahn, 'Preliminary investigations and cognitive considerations of the acoustical resonances of selected archaeological sites', *Antiquity* Vol.70, No.269 (Sept 1996) p665-6.

### Earthworks and jargon

To many *At the Edge* readers it would be self-evident that prehistoric ditches occupy locations in the landscape which were significant to the people who created them. To academics justifying mega-investments in high-powered computers, it is necessary to discuss 'visibility barriers', 'viewsheds' and even 'cumulative viewsheds' before coming to the same conclusion. Cynicism apart, an excellent taster of what GIS (i.e. 3D computer mapping) can offer archaeologists and should lead on to less self-evident interpretations of ancient landscapes.

M. Llobera, 'Exploring the topography of mind: GIS, social space and archaeology', *Antiquity* Vol.70, No.269 (Sept 1996) p612-22.

### Mine or shrine?

The flint mines at Grimes Graves, generally considered to be evidence of neolithic 'heavy industry', may be a result of intense ritual activity according to recent reinterpretation. Furthermore, the flint mined from Grimes Graves generally was not used for tools but for ceremonial artefacts.

'Grimes Graves mined "for ritual reasons"', *British Archaeology*, No.18 (Oct 1996), p5.

### First farmers = first brewers?

Brewing was known in Sumner c.1800BC and in ancient Egypt. Tentative evidence recovered from excavations at North Mains, Scotland, suggests that around 2330BC British people were making alcoholic beverages based on meadowsweet and grain. This raises the possibility that early farmers were not growing grain for making porridge or bread - but for brewing intoxicating drinks. Brewing itself is a 'magical' process and little imagination is needed to suggest that alcoholic drinks would be used for mind-altering 'rituals'.

Merryn Dineley 'Finding magic in Stone Age real ale', *British Archaeology*, No.19 (Nov 1996), p6.

### From the Original Tree

Excavations at Billown, Isle of Man, have revealed a complex sequence of Neolithic activity - which seems to be focused on a pit which itself is near a tree hole. The pit has been dated at about 4500 BC, in the Mesolithic, and the tree may have been the original focus of ritual activity. This was followed by a large Neolithic ditched enclosure with an entrance which 'aligns' with South Barrule, a 480 metre high mountain to the north. More or less contemporary with the ditches are at least three deep shafts - perhaps for ritual purposes rather than collecting

water. Later in the Neolithic, a 'mini henge' was constructed, 'perpetuating the earlier alignments'. Subsequently a 'substantial' Bronze Age house and a possible Iron Age burial monument were built on the site.

Timothy Darvill, 'Billown, Isle of Man', *Current Archaeology* No.150 (Nov 1996) p232-7

### Prehistoric mud art

Following from petroglyphs (the academic-speak for rock art) we now have mud-glyphs. A pre-Conquest cave site in Tennessee has revealed numerous motifs inscribed into the mud of the walls; other caves in the region have also been investigated and shown to conceal similar decoration.

C.H. Faulkner and J.F. Simek, '1st Unnamed Cave: a Mississippian period cave art site in east Tennessee, USA', *Antiquity*, Vol.70, (No.270), 1996, p774-84

### 6000 years of Rainbow Serpents

Australian Aborigine paintings of so-called Rainbow Serpents (a mythical primeval creature believed to have been inspired by the Ribboned Pipefish) have been dated to between 4,000 and 6,000 years old - and there is a stylistic progression through to the present day. This is perhaps a unique example of continuity in rock art and provides good evidence for a similar continuity in spiritual beliefs.

R. Uhlig 'In the beginning, faith turned up down under' *Daily Telegraph* 31st October 1996 [cutting kindly submitted by Rose Heaword].

### Spirit ways and death roads

In the first of what is promised to be a series of articles, the Dutch 'death roads', Germany 'ghost paths', Viking 'cult roads' and Worcestershire 'corpse ways'



and considered as 'a universal expression of the human mind' which first manifested as shamanic 'spirit lines'.

'Lines on the landscape: spirit ways and death roads', *The Ley Hunter* No.126 (Nov 1996) p16-19

### Surveyors and social order

The act of surveying and drawing out maps requires a convention which is deeply implicated in the social politics of the society. These maps in turn implicitly influenced the activities of ley hunters and other geomantic researchers. Jeremy Harte cuts neatly though the interwoven inferences and fallacies in 'Taking leave of Dod: survey as metaphor', *The Ley Hunter* No.126 (Nov 1996) p21-5

### From Avon to Avon

There are three rivers in the south-west of England called Avon (from the Celtic *afon*, meaning 'river'). They form the shortest route (allowing for a short overland link north of Stonehenge) through Wessex and into the Midlands. Whoever controlled this territory could be expected to be rich and powerful. Powerful enough to erect the famous Neolithic monuments? And for the routeways to remain important into the iron age?

Andrew Sherratt 'Linking Wessex with three rivers Avon', *British Archaeology* No.20 (Dec 1996) p6

### Somerset stones

Local fieldwork reveals little-known standing stones around the Mendips.

Phil Quinn 'The forgotten stones of West Mendip', *3rd Stone* No.25 (Spring 1997) p13-15

### Hill forts as social statements

The notion that hill forts are poor defensive sites has been around for decades. Several examples from south-east Wales are considered as complex 'social statements' with various levels of

symbolism.

George Children and George Nash, 'Encoding space: the Iron Age of south-east Wales - a question of defence of social statementing', *3rd Stone* No.25 (Spring 1997) p7-12 & 26

### Stone rows as observatories

Two short stone rows on Mull have been investigated as possible astronomical markers although the results 'suggest' a more complex relationship between site locations, astronomical events and the landscape than has hitherto been appreciated.

R.D. Martlew and C.L.N. Ruggles 'Ritual and landscape on the west coast of Scotland: an investigation of the stone rows of northern Mull', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, Vol.62 (1996) pp117-131

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From Nigel Pennick:

### Green Men inn signs

In *At the Edge* No.4 you mentioned the inn sign 'Green Man'. I can push the date for such pubs in London back over 100 years earlier than you mention. A ballad of 1745 talking of inns has the line 'My Lord Cobham's head and the Dulwich Green Man . . .' Also mentioned is a 'Green Man' tavern at Stroud Green in Islington, frequented at the time of Charles II, but Larwood is not clear whether it had the name then.

'The Green Man' in Edgware Road had a medicinal spring in the cellar and patrons were entitled to a free phial of 'eye lotion' (Jacob Larwood and John Camden Hotten, *English Inn Signs*, Chatto and Windus, 1951, p222). This book, which was an update and expansion of Larwood's 1866 work, tells how the Green Man was used on seventeenth century tokens and there represented a forester. Whether the name 'Green Man' is therefore misleading for foliate heads is in question, as Green Man as a pub sign is related to whole figures of foresters, not foliate heads.

In the case of the 'Green Man and Still' pub sign, the Green Man there is likely to be an 'anglicization' of the bearers of the Distillers' Company arms, who are 'Red Indians'.

It appears that because Lady Raglan used the inn sign name to describe foliate heads then a connection was made which may

not have existed in earlier times. There appears to be much interchange between the pub signs 'Green Man', 'Wild Man' and 'Robin Hood'. There is the German in sign 'Zum Wilden Mann' which I have seen in many places, depicted as a foliated whole being, but I am still investigating that.

So I hope this is of some use in unravelling the semantic connections made by lady Raglan and her followers.

From Chris Jenkins:

## Old yews 'reinstated'

Much as I enjoyed Jeremy Harte's well-researched article in *At the Edge* No.4, I am sorry to say that I cannot agree with his conclusions. In his zeal to disprove Allen Meredith's theory on the age of yews he has made some assertions which, frankly, do not hold together.

He states that Fountains Abbey was founded in 1132 on a green field site, yet in a well-known tradition, the pioneer monks who came here sheltered within the ancient yews already there, of a known sacred grove. This story, recorded by a monk of Kirkstall a century after the event, is published in Bogg's *Richmondshire and the Vale of Mowbray* (p63). There were seven stately evergreen yews of colossal size, the trunk of one being 27 feet in width. This immediately disproves Jeremy's theory that the yews there are not of great age, even if they are not the largest known in Britain.

Even more convincing evidence for the age of yews can be found at Bicknoller in Somerset. In the churchyard is an ancient yew, its limbs carried by crutches. The problem for Jeremy is that exactly the same tree is depicted, also on crutches, on some bench ends in the church, carved in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, I can see no difference in the size of the tree between then and now, and the present church

building is only about three centuries older than these bench ends, proving that the church was rebuilt without damaging the yew itself. This again proves that yews can remain for centuries without growing and even in rare cases contracting in size.

It seems to me to be absurd to try to be definitive about the age of sites. Archaeology is full of examples of continuous occupation from stone age to Saxon times and up to now. Churches frequently reuse Saxon, Roman or older material and no one doubts that temples were erected in sacred groves. The *nemetons* like Buxton (Derbyshire) are an example. Even if Lytchett Matravers did become a separate parish in the tenth century, why should this be an objection for the yew to be growing there in earlier ages?

It may also be the case that yews were cut down in earlier ages but regrew from the root systems. When the Glastonbury sacred oak avenue was cut down about 1910 (two of the oak still remain), 2000 growth rings were counted, proving that oaks can live at least that long. So why cannot yews be older, especially given their reputation for everlasting life from their root systems?

From Brian Rich:

## Tree veneration in the Peak District

Regarding Paul Wain's article in *At the Edge* No.4, the references to Churchtown and Darley are to the same tree. The church at Darley village is at Churchtown (Grid Reference 267630). The earliest documented reference to the Edden Tree is 1570 (*Edwentrie*). It is unlikely to mean Edwin's Tree and there is no evidence for the belief in the capture of a Saxon king. Indeed, there is no evidence of any bloodshed in Bradwell. Gore Lane could be from the Old English *gara*, 'a gore, a triangular piece of ground, a

point of land'. The first documented evidence of Rebellion Knoll is not until 1840; it could refer to any local rebellion. Finally, note the correct spelling of Coton in the Elms.

From Robert Morrell:

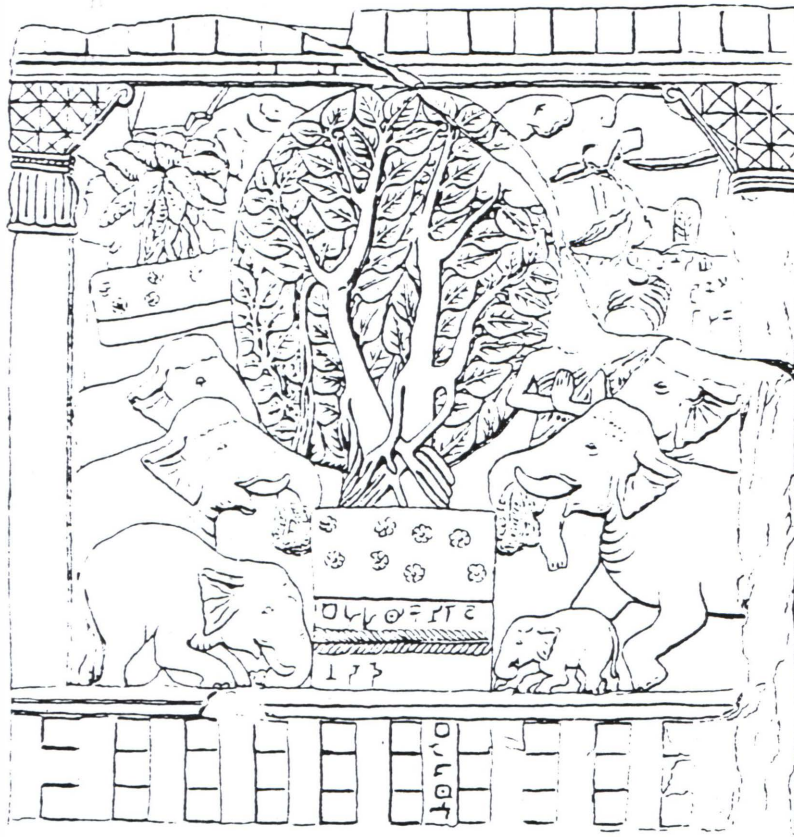
## Indian tree veneration

The various articles on trees and their associated folklore in issue four of *At the Edge* made interesting reading. Jeremy Harte's cautionary observations about the potentially late origin of some of the beliefs concerning trees in Britain were well worth expressing, although as K.C. Aryan has noted in respect to the folk beliefs of Indian rural communities, and which could possibly apply in the past here, the rural folk 'may well not be able to read or write, but they are fully conversant with their religious scriptures; their traditions are transmitted to them orally - by their ancestors and their village priests' (*Folk Bronzes of North-Western India*. Delhi, Rekha Praskasan, 1973. p11).

If we want to study tree worship, or the cult of the sacred tree, India provides the best place for such an investigation as the cult remains an integral part of an extant faith, Hinduism. Such a study suggests that the information gleaned could possibly shed some light on the now forgotten folk customs Mr Harte and others write about.

G.S. Pillai has traced the existence of the worship of trees in India back thousands of years, showing that some elements are certainly pre-Aryan (*Tree Worship and Ophiolatry*. Annamalai University Publication, 1948. pp1-4). Sir John Marshall of the Archaeological Survey of India, however, was of the opinion that when India was Aryanised tree worship became subordinated to other cults. A study of the cult shows it to be closely associated with snake





Wild elephants paying their devotions to the sacred banian of Kasyapa Buddha. From J.H. Philpot, *The Sacred Tree* (1897).

worship, as the title of Pillai's book implies, but this association may in fact predate Aryanisation. Villages throughout Southern India each have their local Nagakals which are areas, or shrines which are frequently enclosed where sacred trees and cobra stones abound. Snakes live in holes around the bases of the sacred trees and are ritually offered milk and food daily by the villagers, although it is the local avian population which appears to benefit most from this practice.

The most sacred tree in India is probably the *asvattha*, which is closely associated with fertility rites. Women worship it on the day of the new moon and childless women can be observed doing a circumambulation of them. These trees are generally, but not exclusively, considered to be female and consequently symbolic of fertility as well as

benevolence. In Vedic hymns we find trees being eulogised both in their own right and because of their association with the gods, which may be the reason for Marshall's conclusion. It is a tradition in Indian lore that because the gods were originally worshipped under trees this practice predated the introduction of temples. This tradition finds expression in the presence of sacred trees within temple complexes, as in the great temple at Madura (Mathura). The *Thiruvilaiyadpuranam* tells of the god Indri, who had just managed to rid himself of a curse (Indian deities often display very human traits), wandering through a wood of kadamba trees when he chanced across Shiva in the form of a lingam ensconced under the shade of one of the trees, here he erected a turreted canopy where he worshipped the god.

Subsequently a great temple was built at the site in which to this day can be seen a much venerated kadamba tree.

A tree could be used to create a god, as in the story of Parvati making a son out of an asoka tree. This is a tale feminists might find difficulty in appreciating for when mocked by sages for her act, the goddess replied with the assertion that a sacrifice was worth ten daughters but a son was worth ten sacrifices while a sacred tree was worth ten sons (P.B. Courtwright. *Ganesa, Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings*. OUP, 1985. pp60-61).

The pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) is sacred to Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, though perhaps more so to the latter, for it was while meditating under one (having also been protected against the elements by a snake king) that Siddhartha received enlightenment and became the Buddha, the tree itself becoming known as the Bodhi, or Bo, tree. A Buddhist tradition has it that the tree itself had been 'born' at the exact moment of Siddhartha's birth. Long before images of the Buddha became objects for veneration (for the evolution of the image see A.K. Coomaraswamy. *The Origin of the Buddha Image*. New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1972. A.C. Sahoo. 'Origin of the Buddha Image.' *J. Num. Soc. India*. 50 1 & 2 (combined). 1988. pp71-74, and J. Cribb. 'The Origin of the Buddha Image - The Numismatic Evidence.' in B. Allchin (ed.) *South Asian Archaeology 1981*. CUP, 1984. pp231-244), pieces of the tree had become objects for veneration. Original Buddhism was atheistic with the gods being looked upon as projections of the human mind. (Christinas Humphreys. *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism*. Curzon Press, 1992. p84) and also denied the existence of a soul (T. Rhys Davids. *Buddhism*. SPCK, 1910. p99). Professor Davids' wife, a Christian, sought to show that

Buddhism was not atheistical; see her paper, 'Was Original Buddhism Atheistic?' *The Hibbert Journal*. Vol.37 No.1 1938. pp117-122. Her husband had died in 1922 so was not around to correct her rather confused arguments.

But the Bodhi Tree is by no means the only such tree sacred to Buddhism. There is the rose-apple tree which shaded the infant Siddhartha from the sun's rays, moving itself around to do so, and the sal tree, in a grove of which he was, according to one tradition, born and under the shade of one where he attained nirvana. However, despite its sacred character did not prevented sal trees being cut down for the wood to be made into charcoal (V. Ball. *Jungle Life in India or the Journeys and Journals of an Indian Geologist*. London, T. de la Rue, 1880. p668).

Indian Buddhists shared with Hindus a belief in *yakishis*, a female form of supernatural being (the male is called a *yakishas*) often found attendant on Kuvera, the god of wealth but also associated with Kali (who could be benevolent as well as ferocious). Iconographically they are sometimes depicted as tree spirits, as on the Buddhist shrines at Bharhut and Sanchi and on the Jain shrine at at Mathura, where they are shown as erotic figures hanging on to or entwined around ashoka or pipal trees, thus endowing them with a fertility symbolism. This accords with Indian folklore in which such tree spirits are considered to possess the ability to cause a tree to blossom by simply kicking it. At Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh, the mother of Siddhartha, Queen Maya, is shown as a tree nymph magically fertilising a tree by seizing its branches with her hands and giving the trunk a kick with her left heel. In addition the space they encompass when placed at the entrance to a shrine they endow the area with an auspicious character. This belief speculatively suggests that holed

megaliths in Britain could represent substitute trees with the aperture having the same auspicious character. But, as I said, this is speculation.

Can what we know from Indian sources be applied in Europe? This is possible, particularly in light of the current cautious re-evaluation of some Celtic iconography to suggest it depicts Indian imagery. Terminology may differ, but ideas and beliefs do not arise in an intellectual and social vacuum and allowing for differences it can be said that in broad terms the social and economic factors effecting our ancient European ancestors were probably akin to those effecting the people of India and other places, so parallels cannot be ruled out even if association cannot be established.

From Andy Collins:

## Flames over Ashes

Many thanks for the review of my book *From the Ashes of Angels* in *At the Edge* No.4. I feel that its author, Bob Morrell, fails to convey to the reader an objective view of its contents, so I feel I must respond. He begins by stating that the pseudepigraphical work entitled the Book of Enoch, a work crucial to my hypothesis, only dates to the second century BC and is simply the ramblings of Hasidaean reactionary Jews who lived during this era. This therefore demolishes my suggestion that its story of the fall of the angels, or Watchers as they are referred to here, is an abstract echo of historical events belonging to some prehistoric age.

This I feel is missing the point, since the parts of the Book of Enoch featuring the fall of the Watchers were borrowed from an earlier work entitled the Book of Noah, written long before the Hasidaean period. This I point out in Chapter Three of *Ashes*, and yet Morrell fails to mention this fact.

The only material of relevance to my thesis from the

Hasidaean period of Jewish history is the recurring descriptions of Watchers in religious literature. These convey certain archetypal impressions - first found in the Book of Noah - that are greatly at variance with the Christian idea of renaissance- and Pre-Raphaelite-style angels with glowing halos and beautiful wings. Those in Noahic and Enochian literature of Dead Sea origin are repeatedly referred to as tall with serpent-like features, white and ruddied skin, white hair and burning eyes. They are also seen in connection with bird-man imagery and are described on one occasion as wearing cloaks of feathers, and on another as wearing a cloak dark but many-coloured, a description I interpret as the iridescent effect of dark feathers, like those of vultures, ravens or crows. The earliest accounts make no reference to the angels possessing wings. No mention too of the clear relationship between the Enochian Watcher material and Akkadian texts dating back as early as 2200 BC, 2000 years before the Hasidaean period of Jewish history. In these the abode of the gods is not only referred to as *edin*, the root behind the Hebrew word 'Eden', but it is also placed in a high cedar-bearing country that is almost certainly the mountainous landscape of Turkish Kurdistan - the setting for both Eden and paradise in Jewish tradition.

No mention is made of my argument that the Watchers may well have been a shamanistic culture living in the mountains of Kurdistan c.8500-2000 BC. Their clear association with bird symbolism fits well with the fact that in this very region, where the Neolithic revolution began shortly after the recession of the last Ice Age, there is evidence, dating to as early as the ninth millennium BC, of an advanced predatory-bird cult focused mainly around the vulture - a symbol of death, mortality; and other-world journeys. This same cult



introduced excarnation across the Old World, from Asia Minor to the Indus Valley, and was undoubtedly responsible for its survival among the Zoroastrians and Mandaean of Persia, as well as the Parsees of India.

This, I suggest might well have been the true source behind the apparent contact between human kind and alleged supernatural beings such as the Watchers of Enochian tradition and the Anannage of Akkadian legend.

I suggest that the ancestors of the Watchers were linked with the Sphinx-building culture of the Nile, who were also responsible for early megalithic temples at locations such as Giza and Abydos, c.10,500–9000 BC. I realise that the main evidence for the existence of this Egyptian elder culture hinges on the work of Dr Robert Schoch and John Anthony West in re-dating the Sphinx monument through geology to at least c.8000 BC. This hypothesis has been around now for the past four years and in all this time no geologist or Egyptologist has been able to suitably contest it. There have been attempts, mostly by anti-West campaigner Mark Lehner of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation. Yet Lehner's most serious criticisms have recently been demolished by West in speculative Egyptological journal *KMT* (Vol. 7, No. 1, Spring 1996, pp. 3–6). At present there are no other serious contenders to Schoch and West's theory, and, as I'm sure many readers will agree, the weathering on the Sphinx, as well as on its surrounding enclosure wall and the nearby Valley Temple, conforms perfectly to heavy rain erosion. Since the last time that rain in this quantity fell on Egypt was during the Neolithic sub-pluvial, c.8000-4500 BC, it implies that these weathering effects date back to this distant epoch of prehistory.

And what is the problem in assuming that the proto-neolithic peoples of Afro-Asia did not possess advanced forms of culture? At Jericho, just 250

miles from Giza, an unknown Nabatian culture built a sophisticated town with a colossal stone tower, walled defences and a deeply dug ditch cut into the bed-rock c.7000 BC. The Catal Huyuk people of Anatolia built a huge sub-surface metropolis that included temple shrines dedicated to the bull and the vulture, c.6500 BC, while the unknown peoples of Nevali Cori, also in Anatolia, left behind a stone-built village displaying clear signs of an advanced social and religious structure, as well as a highly evolved sub-surface temple with a flat stone floor and a huge rectilinear monolith, c.8000 BC.

I feel that *From the Ashes of Angels* brings together what we know of this subject and helps reconstruct our lost past. In my mind there are chapters missing from the orthodox history, presented to us by academics and so blindly accepted by people such as Bob Morrell, who see fit to dismiss anything that does not conform to their own narrow view of world history simply because they think they are 'experts' and know better than you or me.

Such people are not 'experts' at all, and I hope that others will judge my work with a more objective approach. Thank you again for your interest.

#### Response from Robert Morrell:

As Mr Collins objects at some length to my review of his book, *From the Ashes of Angels*, perhaps I should spell out in simple terms its primary defect in light of his inability to comprehend my central point.

The ancient texts which he agrees are crucial to his theory have attracted serious scholarly interest for centuries, so whether he likes the fact or not, he was under an obligation to assess his own theory regarding them against those advanced by others, or at least the more important of them, to demonstrate to his readers that his is the more plausible. He saw fit to avoid doing this for reasons not revealed, thus

suggesting ignorance on his part concerning them. Moreover, no attempt is made to dispute the findings of recent research which indicates the texts (including the Book of Moses, which comes within the time span mentioned in my review) are simply the re-working of ideas derived from pre-Judaic polytheistic cults. This means the foundation upon which Collins erects his superstructure, with its many questionable assumptions and glib claims, is too insecure to be taken seriously and so rendered any examination of it on my part unnecessary.

From Rodney Castleden:

### Cerne Giant fights back

In his review of my book *The Cerne Giant* in *At the Edge* No. 4, Mr Harte accuses me of 'wild speculation' because I had the enterprise to retranslate the Latin account of St Augustine's encounter with the Giant that Gotselin wrote in 1091. Mr Harte evidently feels happier with the inaccurate and unscholarly translation by Jerome Porter (1632) or with paraphrases based on Porter by later writers who are too idle to look at the Latin original.

Mr Harte homes in on my translation of *et Heliae typo* (original Gotselin). This could not possibly mean 'after the example of Elijah' (Porter). Elijah is slipped in only as the Biblical name closest in form to 'Helia', a pagan name Porter had probably never come across in any other context and therefore did not know how to deal with. 'Typus' simply does not mean and never did mean 'example' but always meant 'figure on a wall' or 'bas-relief'. The basis for this is Cassell's *Latin Dictionary*, Lewis and Short's *Latin Dictionary* and the *Letters* of Cicero, not speculation.

Translation from a partially understood ancient language, Brythonic, is a different matter.

My proposal that 'Durotriges' may have meant 'water people' is based on parallels between the elements within the name and similar modern Welsh words meaning 'water' and 'inhabitants'. I would agree this is an attempt at reconstruction of a lost language, but it is arguable and plausible, and I cannot see how Mr Harte, knowledgeable though he may be, can be in a position to say categorically that it is wrong.

Some scholars believe Dunon may have been Hod Hill, others that it was Maiden Castle; again, Mr Harte is in no position to arbitrate in what must remain a matter of opinion. Mr Harte seems keen on spotting what he calls 'slips'. Here's one of his. The great Augustine, archbishop of Canterbury, visiting Cerne to confront Helis-worshippers - was he a *local* saint?

In the Abstracts section, Mr Harte appears again as the source of news about the Cerne Giant. The caption should read 'Cerne Abbas *Giant* to be dated', but even that is not quite true. As one of the two coordinators of the Cerne Giant Project, I may be able to clarify

what is happening. The next phase is still being planned but has outline approval from National Trust and English Heritage. It will include small-scale excavations, with the aim of finding the former positions of the edges of the outline trench. We don't know whether the outline has moved about, or what its original width was. These are things we need to know in order to decide how best to manage and present the figure. We also hope to find out how deep the outline trench is, and will look for evidence of former scourings: maybe we will be able to count them like tree-rings. There's also a chance, but no more, that silts from a very early stage in the Giant's history may survive at the bottom of the trench. If they do, and only if, we hope to take samples for OSL dating. That may give us a date for the Giant.

#### Response from Jeremy Harte:

It is kind of Mr Castleden to take notice of my review. Yes, *typus* does refer only to physical objects in classical Latin; but in the medieval theological writers it acquires the sense of 'example', strictly speaking an Old Testament example prefiguring later events. I think this metaphorical usage was first coined by Tertullian; at all events it appears in St Jerome's introduction to the Vulgate. Jerome refers to Elijah as *Elias*, but the late Latin authors are as free as Cockneys with their h's, and the form *Helias* is quite common, being used by St Ambrose. I translated the words 'et Heliae typus' with this in mind.

The *Cerne Giant* is a genuinely useful book. I made my quibbles as a caution to readers that the author sometimes likes to argue from plausibility when he could have consulted standard authors instead. With the Durotriges, for instance, the Victorian derivations of this name from the Welsh *dwr*, 'water', are

wrong because the British form of this word was *\*dubro*, not *duro*, and you can find a better discussion of the tribal name in Rivet and Smith's *Placenames of Roman Britain*. This work is also the authority for locating Ptolemy's Dunon at Hod Hill. Of course experts may change their minds on this, as may happen with almost any aspect of the Giant. It is this which makes Mr Castleden's proposed excavation of the figure such an exciting project.

From Alastair McBeath:

### That's no lizard . . . (and not much of a man, either)

As a fan of dragons, I must protest at the caption to the third photo down on page 21 of *At the Edge* No.4. A 'sprightly lizard'? It has wings! That's no lizard - it's a dragon! It is also a dragon coming from the mouth of a human face, where one would normally expect to find a foliate branch in a 'typical' (if any such a thing should exist) Green Man, which makes it equally interesting to my mind.

I picked up a (sadly discontinued) booklet at Durham Cathedral, *Grotesques from Durham Cathedral* by Gloria Parkin (Gilesgate Studio 1989) which contains selected drawings by the author from stone carvings on the cathedral. These include an unusual three-quarter length Green Man figure, eyes closed, with foliage extending from the corners of his mouth, and with more indeterminate foliage around his head and shoulders, while his right arm bears a fearsome-looking (?) wooden club.

I am not convinced by the supposedly anthropomorphic rock carving on page 33 of *At the Edge* No. 4. Northumberland has rock art at least this convincing as human figures (cf. Stan Beckensall's *Prehistoric Rock Carvings*, Pendulum Publications, 1983, especially the West Horton site p97-8) which is to say, not very!

#### Next issue:

### A sex and gender special!

Hilda Davidson  
*Women on the Rampage*

Susan Evasdaughter  
*A feminist perspective on Bronze Age Crete*

Lynn Meskell  
*Constructing Sex and Gender in Archaeology*

Thorskegga Thom  
*Folklore of Weaving and Spinning*

Bob Trubshaw  
*Weaving the World*



# REVIEWS R

Sandra Billington and  
Miranda Green (eds)

## THE CONCEPT OF THE GODDESS

Routledge 1996  
216 x 138 mm, 208 pages,  
16 b&w photos, hardback  
£35

An impressive and scholarly volume, editors Billington and Green have successfully brought together a wide range of leading experts covering a global geographical perspective. Goddesses in a variety of cultures have been examined, drawing on Celtic, Roman, Norse, Caucasian and Japanese traditions. This collection represents an exciting new area which is both scholarly and yet easily accessible for the general reader. The studies in the volume provide much needed evidence for the multivalent nature of female deities in the past, and indeed in the present, since they span from the 1st century AD to the present. Contrary to universalist concepts of the Goddess, like those propounded by Marija Gimbutas, these papers present a more balanced and contextualised picture. They stress the polyvalency of goddesses - that there are many aspects to female deities and not all of these are positive and worth embracing! Goddesses are not always perfect and

pacifist; Lloyd-Morgan, Herbert, Lysaght and Blacker demonstrate that they can be patrons of hunting, shape-changing hags or messengers of death. Blacker goes as far as demonstrating that the Japanese goddess of the mountain, Yamanokami actually harbours a jealous hatred of women. Many of these researchers then attempt to glean social information from these religious constructions, i.e. what does this reflect about the position, roles, rites of women in society, if anything? Ideology, social or religious, may reflect, mask, or even subvert social reality. At this time such studies of the multifaceted qualities of female deities are much needed to challenge essentialist notions of the female, in both sacred and profane spheres. This is truly an example of good feminist research!

However, the editors are quick to point out that they have not been biased by feminist attitudes and are simply presenting observations resulting from research. Given the scope and background of many of these academics I find this an odd position to begin from. No research is free from theory and bias, on any level. There is no objective recovery of the past. Moreover, feminist research is not tantamount to producing narratives which elevate and mythologise women - this is a dangerous misconception. Feminism is not a unitary, monolithic movement either, since so many positions can be subsumed within a single label. Here I believe many of the authors have conflated feminism with Goddess worship. Many of the papers aim to highlight the modern construction of the Goddess movement, and that this rests less on ancient evidence and more on contemporary desire. The introduction by Miranda Green and the excellent article by Juliette Wood take this stance. This position is welcome and insightful, and it is interesting to see how scholars

in mythology and folklore studies have arrived at this point, perhaps as a result of witnessing their field of research being manipulated in contemporary struggles. However, in related fields this critique has had a longer history and it may have bolstered their case to draw upon that inter-disciplinary material.

The volume explicitly aims to target readers interested in archaeology, ancient history, classical studies, anthropology, folklore and mythology studies, comparative religions and women's studies. As an archaeologist, I would have preferred more attention to archaeological studies, since they still are somewhat lacking. The major focus of the volume is certainly the folklore and mythology studies, as the individual bibliographies demonstrate. The papers are well researched and referenced, however, several seem to rely on rather outdated references.

In sum, this volume is a much-needed scholarly addition to the growing corpus of academic studies of goddesses from a culturally contextual perspective. It is about time that we, as academics, entered the debate and offered the latest evidence to hand in a readable manner<sup>1</sup>. As a result, there may be more lines of agreement than one would imagine. Here I think my own position, as a feminist archaeologist, concurs with that of Carol Christ. She argues that neither Biblical nor prehistoric traditions of ancient goddesses are needed but new traditions must be created (see Juliette Wood's contribution). It is important for all of us, in a variety of fields, not to conflate or confuse terminology or disciplinary frameworks: feminism, feminist theology, Goddess veneration, New Age spirituality, mythology and folklore studies etc. Moreover, archaeology has a long history of drawing on other fields for inspiration and explanation,

whether implicitly or explicitly. I think Ronald Hutton has highlighted this fittingly in his *The pagan religions of the ancient British isles* (Blackwell 1991): he suggests archaeologists may indeed be responsible, through their interpretations, for the creation of the New Religion themselves!

Lynn Meskell

I: Lynn Meskell is a postgraduate student at Cambridge University, in case there is any ambiguity as to who 'we' are. An article by Lynn on 'Constructing sex and gender in archaeology' will be in the next issue of *At the Edge*. R.N.T.

Christopher Tilley

## AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE NEOLITHIC

### Early Prehistoric Societies in Southern Scandinavia

Cambridge University Press  
255 x 180 mm, 363 pages,  
fully illustrated, hardback  
£50.00.

Christopher Tilley, who has been one of the least inaccessible champions of 'interpretative archaeology', has set out his stall with what is surely one of the most important archaeological studies of the decade. Here, he applies insights from social anthropology to the late Mesolithic and early and middle Neolithic cultures of Sweden and Denmark to produce the first ethnoarchaeological study worthy of the name. It is not all theory and abstraction, however. There is enough nuts-and-bolts archaeology to satisfy the most hardened traditionalist.

But it is the author's interpretations of the evidence and his use of ethnological

comparisons that really catch the eye. For instance, Tilley uses mortuary practices of Papua New Guinea and Madagascar to illustrate possible interpretations of the treatment of the dead in middle Neolithic Scandinavia, suggesting a shift in burial practices, from early Neolithic concealment of the dead and their separation from the living, to a preference for handling, arranging and destruction of the dead to extinguish individual identity and incorporate into the social whole - the dead become artefacts, used to express the nature of the group, its structure and the pattern of gender and other relationships.

One problem with this kind of comparison is that, while modern ethnographies deal with observed behaviour and the collection of living traditions, the Neolithic has no such data to offer - only bones, stones, and the remains of objects unused for several millennia. There is no-one left to speak for it from first hand experience. Even ethnological data gathered from the earliest written sources can only enable a rather one-sided comparison. Even so, there are 'ethnographies' closer in time and space to Neolithic Scandinavia than, say, the Trobriand islands of the early twentieth century, and it would have been interesting to see some use made of material dealing with early Indo-European-speakers of northern Europe - particularly in view of Colin Renfrew's proposed Neolithic origins for Indo-European languages.

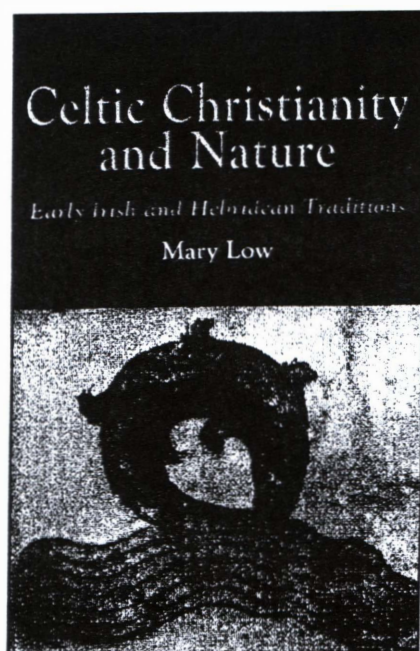
Still, Tilley's comparisons provide much food for thought. The influence of Lévi-Strauss is evident in his consideration of physiological symmetry and binary expressions of social relationships. There is no doubt that his interpretation of gendered duality - as represented by pots and axes - is a valuable insight. Tilley's perception of symmetrical mortuary arrangements is just as persuasive, although he sometimes allows himself to get a bit carried away with the idea.

For instance, his interpretation of the arrangement of human bones - right/left and upper/lower differentiations - in the chambered tombs at Carlshögen and Ramshög in Sweden seems slightly forced, although there certainly does appear to have been deliberate selection according to some preconceived pattern involving opposition along the lines Tilley suggests.

But these are minor complaints which somehow seem pretty churlish when one considers the excellence of this splendid and highly readable book. From the very beginning, when the author wistfully ponders the imaginary advantages of a time machine to the archaeologist, to the conclusion, an evocative overview of Neolithic Scandinavian societies, *An Ethnography of the Neolithic* is a superb study. The final 'Epilogue' chapter is simply dynamic. Tilley makes a number of theoretical propositions concerning the interpretation of the archaeological record. While there is not space here to go into them in any detail, it should be noted that Tilley's explanations of these propositions is both lucid and concise. Indeed, it is rare for such ideas - Tilley's are based on theories of language and signs - to be expounded with this degree of clarity. What is more, they may just turn out to be the most important contribution to archaeology for many years. For instance, Tilley's second proposition is that 'a future general theory of material culture is likely to be based on the twin pillars of metaphor and metonymy' (page 338). Familiar territory for certain connoisseurs of archaic cosmology, perhaps, but a radical departure for archaeology - signalling, hopefully, a long overdue meaningful meeting of the two fields. To find out what Tilley means - and his exposition is crystal clear - read the book.

Alby Stone





Mary Low

## CELTIC CHRISTIANITY AND NATURE

Edinburgh University Press  
1996  
138 x 218 mm, 232 pages,  
paperback, £12.95

One of the challenges of editing *At the Edge* is the sheer quantity of periodicals and books which need at least a quick read. Sadly, this quantity is rarely matched by quality. So it is doubly satisfying when a book arrives which stimulates and inspires in good measure. Indeed, if *At the Edge* was ever to do anything so naff as instigate a 'book of the year award', then *Celtic Christianity and Nature* would be my nomination for 1996.

The title is inauspicious, in that much drivel has been written on Celtic Christianity in recent years. Forget this. Mary Low writes as a scholar with a great breadth of scope and a sure footing among the pitfalls of the topics. She takes as her starting point the oft-repeated remark that love of nature is a

characteristic of Celtic Christianity. She shows how pre-Christian beliefs were rejected, transformed or restated as the people of early medieval Ireland adopted Christianity. St Patrick himself remembers how, as a young man, he found God in the forests and on the mountain, in all weathers. The traditions of other saints such as Colum Cille and Brigit also include close contact with nature. The early Christian Irish poets chose to write extensively about nature, revealing both close observation and a celebration of the world around them. But this was not a detached view, rather they retained an emotional connection in that nature was a place of prayer for many of them, and a place of both healing and inspiration.

In these early medieval poems nature appears in the form of mountains and hills, water (wells, rivers, sea), trees and woods, birds and animals, the seasons, the sun, the weather (especially storms) and the elements - notably fire. Mary Low discusses each of these in detail. The opening chapter on 'The Land' is rich with the interactions between such pre-Christian ideas as the 'Land of Goddesses' and the 'Sovereignty Goddess' and the Land of Israel and the Biblical Land of Promise.

Given that Celtic Christianity, more so than the Roman sect, drew heavily on the pre-Christian worldview, much of the veneration of nature in early Christian writing must have its origins in the preceding cultures, although Low is too solid a scholar to allow such speculation to take the foreground.

This is a book with few weaknesses and, rather than continue to summarise the contents, I will simply state that this is essential reading for all *At the Edge* readers.

Bob Trubshaw

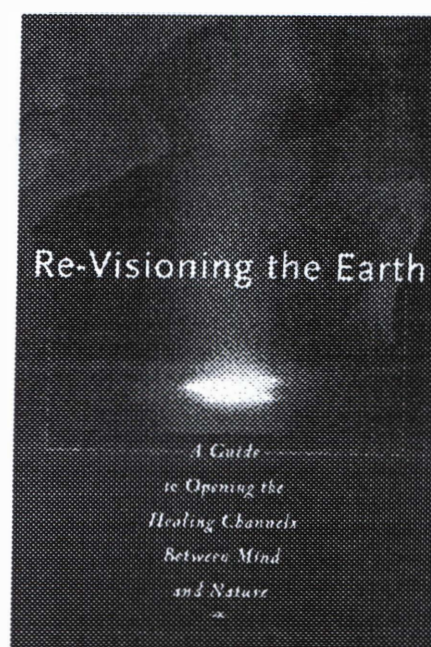
Paul Devereux

## RE-VISIONING THE EARTH

A guide to opening  
the healing channels  
between mind and  
nature

Fireside 1996  
215 x 140 mm, 304 pages,  
illustrated, paperback.  
Published in USA only.  
Limited number of copies  
available in UK only from  
The Ley Hunter, PO Box  
258, Cheltenham, GL53  
0HR.

OK, the sub-title's totally off-putting but this is a book 'packaged' for the American market. Unfortunately, as Americans seem to be unremittingly 'New Age' in their outlook, the contents will probably be wasted on most of the readers. *Re-visioning the Earth* is the culmination of various concepts which Devereux has been working on in recent years. After an short anecdotal appreciation of the advent of Lovelock's Gaia



Hypothesis the reader is lurched into the 'deep end' of what those in the 'trade' refer to as the 'Hard Problem'. The 'trade' in this instance is cognitive science and the 'hard problem' is the most fundamental of all problems - understanding how consciousness 'works'.

And, so far, cognitive scientists know just enough about consciousness to recognise that they know next to nothing. So, if we don't even understand more than the most rudimentary 'mechanics' of how we think, what hope of understanding other cultures separated in time or place? The modern Western mentality clearly is alien to indigenous cultures worldwide (although has succeeded in all-but destroying all traditional ways of thinking). What emerges from the ethnographical literature is the utter 'otherness' of the approaches to, say, landscape.

Have pulled away all the presumptions about how we attribute meaning to the external world, Devereux then embarks on a whistle-stop tour of such widespread 'mindscapes' as sacred centres and *omphaloi*; boundaries and liminality; journeying and pilgrimage; mental maps; and dream incubation. If this all sounds like heavy going then rest assured that Devereux steps lightly. He succeeds in summarising without being excessively superficial or becoming bogged down in details.

Regular readers of *The Ley Hunter* and *At the Edge* will find few surprises in the content - though undoubtedly they will be inspired by the close juxtaposition of so many challenges to presuppositions.

Although not an approach previously used by the author (one suspects some pressure from the publisher) each chapter ends with an 'experiential' section. Yes, get out of your arm chairs and try some DIY consciousness-altering activities. While I will not claim to have followed them all, the suggestions seem both original and worthwhile. Indeed, far

from being a 'tacky afterthought' they provide a positive contribution to the aims of the book.

If the book has a weakness it is simply that the seventeen pages of footnotes do not really reflect the vast literature which lies behind the information summarised. Given the 'popular' format of the book this is understandable but could mislead those unfamiliar with the ideas that there has been little prior consideration or debate.

While I heartily recommend this book to all readers - indeed, to anyone whose outlook is not trapped in a rigid belief system - please note the limited availability in the UK.

Bob Trubshaw

D.C. Starzecha (ed)

## MAORI ART AND CULTURE

British Museum Press 1996  
277 x 220 mm, 168 pages,  
70 colour and 60 b&w  
illustrations, paperback  
£14.99

Anthropology is a discipline which embraces both ethnology and archaeology. Both sub-disciplines have contributed to the understanding of the Maori culture. Yet this book immediately betrays itself as a work by ethnologists. Why? Because the artifacts - in wood and textiles - are all photographed as 'works of art', not merely as objects to be quantified. This is a culture which is presented, even in its prehistoric aspects, as animated rather than encrusted with the dust of archaeological semiotics.

The opening chapters provide a brief account of pre-colonial Maori society and an overview of the modern culture. The main part of the book is devoted to the wood carving and 'fibre arts', with detailed discussion of the examples illustrated and an insight into the techniques used.

Understandably, as the publisher is the British Museum, the final chapter describes how their collection of Maori artifacts was built up.

My previous knowledge of Maori culture and art was, at best, patchy. *Maori Art and Culture* provides far more than a mere introduction and brings the culture to life. Every illustration is deeply informative and many are suitably inspirational.

Bob Trubshaw

Bill Griffiths

## ASPECTS OF ANGLO-SAXON MAGIC

Anglo-Saxon Books 1996  
175 x 245 mm, 245 pages,  
paperback £14.95

There are some books that simply ooze class, and this is one of them. Bill Griffiths has produced an exceptional study of a fascinating facet of Old English cultural history, a virtuoso performance of insight, wit and erudition that left this reader drooling for more. Scholarly works on this subject are few and far between - one cannot count most of the (usually dodgy) books on Germanic/Norse myth and rune magic that have flooded the popular market in recent years - so *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic* is doubly welcome.

The book is divided into two sections. The first is the meat of the book, a wide-ranging and comprehensive discussion of the magical arts in Anglo-Saxon England. Griffiths begins by looking at the pagan Anglo-Saxon cosmos and the interaction of its constituent parts - the gods and their world, the realms inhabited by the dead, and the human world. Following this scene-setting (by no means a mere preamble) Griffiths discusses the use of magic in healing and agriculture, its practitioners,



and various forms of divination. He compares and contrasts different ways of thought - Christian, rational and scientific *versus* the pagan and magical - and comes to some very interesting conclusions. Griffiths also goes some way toward the long-overdue nailing of a few cherished assumptions about runic divination, the ancient history of the World Tree, and the days of the week.

The second part is devoted to a sampler of magical or magic-related texts, in the original languages with translations. These are not limited to Old English texts. Some - such as the two Meresburg Charms - are Old High German. Others are Scandinavian, such as the Icelandic and Norwegian Rune Poems. The net result is a useful compendium of 31 Germanic magic texts: charms against wens, cattle-theft and worms; charms for bees, safe journeys and fertile land; divination by alphabet, dreams and the weather.

The book finishes with five texts devoted to science and knowledge, including an interesting cosmological extract from Alfred's *Metres of Boethius* and - rather fittingly for the final inclusion - a text describing the signs of the fifteen days before

Doomsday. If you see the sea rise to a height of forty ells above the nearest hill, it might be a good idea to take all your money out of the bank and get the drinks in.

*Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic* is a challenging book, a mine of useful information, and excellent entertainment. What more do you want?

Alby Stone

## Bill Griffiths

### SAXON VOICES

Runetree Press 1996

Cassette tape.

£5.50 + 50p p&p from  
Runetree, PO Box 1035,  
London W2 6ZX

Want to hear what Old English sounded like? Then this tape is a 'must'. Caedmon, Beowulf, the Rune Poems and the famous '*Erce Erce Erce Eor?an Modor*' land ceremonies charm are all brought 'to life' with excerpts. Two famous OE poems - *The Seafarer* and *Dream of the Rood* are given the full treatment.

Bob Trubshaw

## John Peddie and

### Patrick Dillon

### ALFRED'S DEFEAT OF THE VIKINGS

Runetree Press 1994

A4, 12 pages, card cover  
£3.00 + 50 p p&p from  
Runetree, PO Box 1035,  
London W2 6ZX

Following on from my review of Stephen Pollington's *The English Warrior* in ATE No.4, and the mention of battles at significant sites, Runetree Press inform me that a reprint is available of a paper originally published in 1981 which tries to establish the location of the Battle of Ethandun. This was the turning point in the campaign between Alfred and

the Vikings. Until then Alfred had been on the losing side but, as a direct consequence of his victory at Ethandun, it was the turn of the Vikings to beat a steady retreat. Had Alfred lost on that fateful day in 878, England would not have come about. The authors argue that the action happened in the vicinity of the iron age hill fort known as Bratton Castle near Warminster. Various other significant landmarks, such as 'Egbert's Stone' are mentioned in the chronicles of the battle but their sites are now ambiguous. A detailed and closely-argued study by respected authors.

Bob Trubshaw

## David Pickering

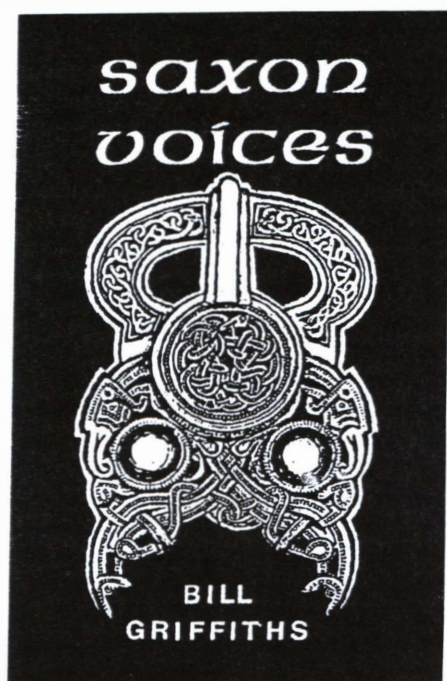
### CASELL

### DICTIONARY OF WITCHCRAFT

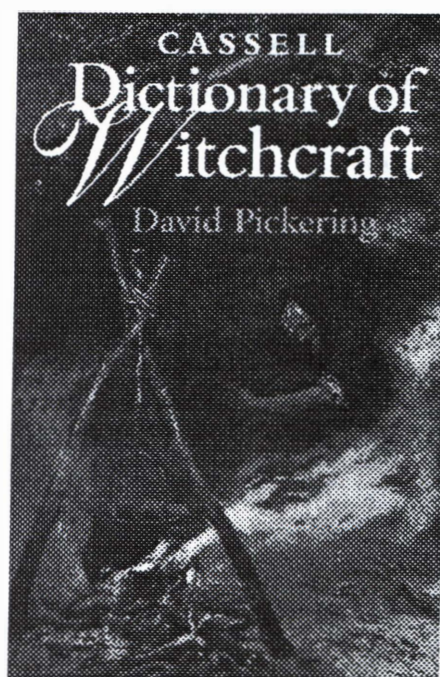
Cassell 1996

243 x 157 mm, 294 pages,  
illustrated, hardback £18.99

Let me be honest - I'm not sure about this one. Cassell are well-known for their reference books and the author is a well-established editor of dictionaries. The information on



At the Edge



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the history of witchcraft is wide-ranging and detailed and the more limited material on modern witchcraft is concise yet informative. Yet I cannot help but feel that this compilation desperately needed the input from at least one person with an active interest in modern-day paganism in all its multifarious forms. The result is a seemingly sound but unnecessarily lifeless reference work.

Bob Trubshaw

## Gwenfran Gwernan

### INTRODUCTION TO WITCHCRAFT

Third edition

Quest 1996

A4, 31 pages, illustrated,  
stapled, card covers,  
£4.00

From: Marian Green,  
BCM-SCL QUEST,  
London, WC1N 3XX

Quite a different undertaking from the *Cassell Dictionary of Witchcraft* but, perhaps, the two complement each other well. A privately-produced booklet which takes a 'question and answer' approach to introducing modern day witchcraft - more specifically, wicca. The author has been teaching wiccan witchcraft for decades.

There is plenty of useful information although I am intrigued by the various unsupported assertions that 'hereditary' witchcraft is thriving (*contra* Michael Howard's letter in *ATE* No.4) and, given that this is intended to be read by someone with little or no prior knowledge of modern witchcraft, uncomfortable that wicca is not portrayed as one among many pagan paths.

Bob Trubshaw

# Editorial

## AFTERTHOUGHTS

Grateful thanks to all subscribers who renewed promptly in recent months. Special thanks to those who took the trouble to comment on what they liked best and what they liked least about *At the Edge*. These comments were most informative although, as there were no consistent 'whinges', I do not plan to make any dramatic changes. Which is not to say that *At the Edge* will not continue to evolve.

One change which has come about, as the more attentive readers will have already noticed, is that references in *At the Edge* have been changed to the so-called 'Harvard system'. This is not, as one contributor alleges, to make the magazine seem more scientific, but simply to make life a little easier for authors and myself - and hopefully for all the readers too. I find the Harvard system generally easier to read than 'old fashioned' end notes; it is certainly easier to prepare and edit articles this way. If nothing else, the Harvard system means that, where there are footnotes, they are self-evidently an addition to the main text; in the old system both references and commentary share the same end notes. Nothing's fixed so far as *At the Edge* is concerned, so I'll be keeping this under review.

The next issue of *At the Edge* is going to be a 'special issue' - in more ways than one. Not only will there be a clear theme linking the main articles, but this theme will - as a one-off exception - extend further than usual from the core interests of 'past and place'. The theme of *At the Edge* No.6 will be 'sex and gender'. Not a sell out to the Rupert Murdoch style of journalism, but more an exercise in popularising some of the hard-hitting rethinking which is on-going among academics. Contributors to the next issue include Lynn Meskell of Cambridge University, whose perceptive article 'Goddesses, Gimbutas and the "New Age" archaeology' appeared in *Antiquity* (Vol.69, No.262, 1995, p74-86). Lynn has written for *At the Edge* on 'Constructing sex and gender in archaeology' - an introduction to an area of archaeological interpretation which is bristling with ideas that seriously challenge the status quo, yet are little known outside academe. Hilda Ellis Davidson will enlighten us about 'Women on the rampage' and other contributors will include Susan Evasdaughter, who takes a feminist approach to bronze age Crete, Thorskegga Thorn on the folklore of weaving and spinning and - depending on what else arrives between now and then - hopefully a few more gems.

Among the favourable comments on the first four issues, the one aspect most consistently mentioned is the 'Abstracts' section. This is especially gratifying as this takes some time (and cost - in the form of subscriptions to academic journals) to prepare. The fact that the Abstracts section in this issue is shorter than in recent issues is circumstantial - you may look forward to a return to a more substantial Abstracts section in the future. Those who find the Abstracts section to be of help will no doubt be especially interested in Jeremy Harte's survey of *Research in Geomancy 1990-94* (see p29).

Finally, a very special thank you to Norman Fahy, who provided the cover illustration for this issue at much shorter notice than I would have wished.



# APRA BOOKS

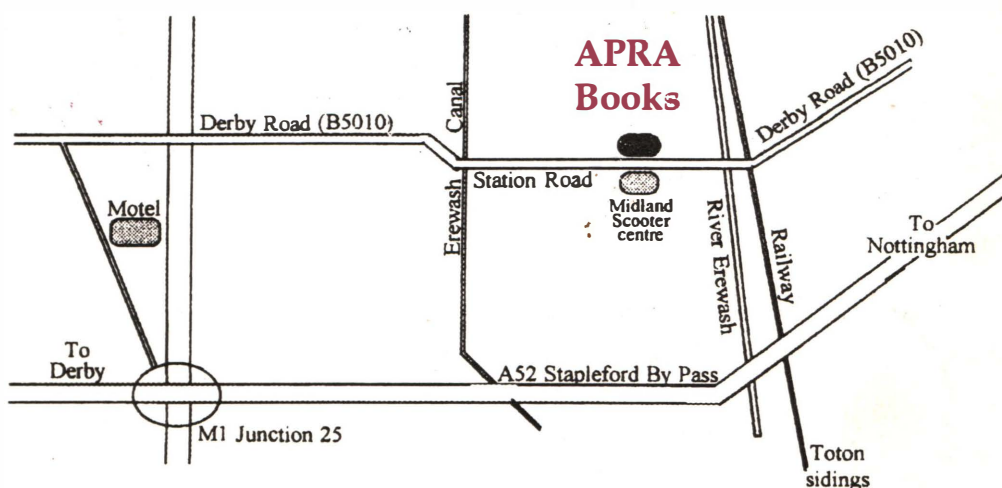
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